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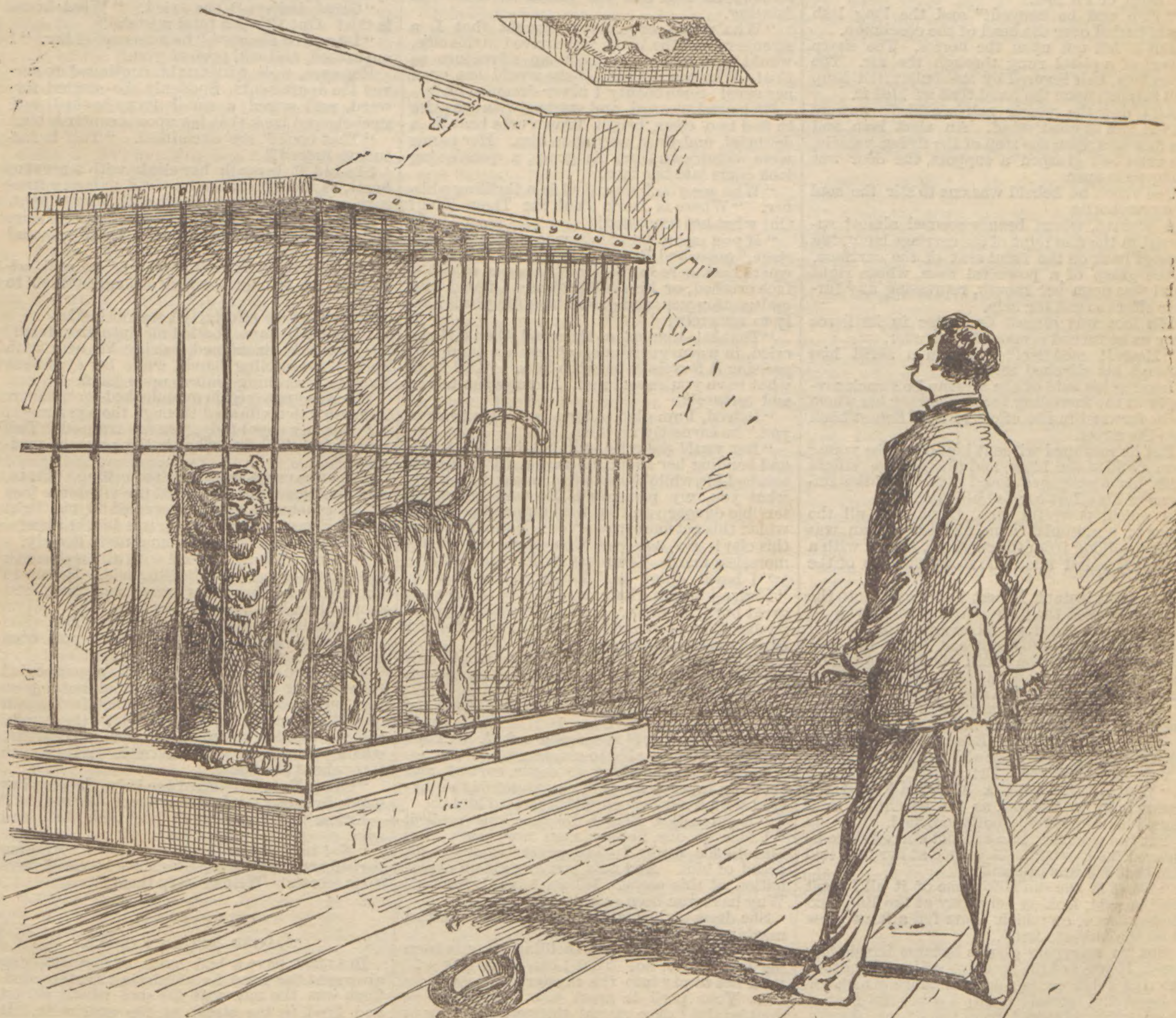
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No. 206.

DARK PAUL, THE TIGER KING; or, CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT, THE BANK RUNNER," "BOB ROCKETT, THE BOY DODGER," "WILL WILDFIRE," ETC., ETC.



LOOKING UP HE SAW, THROUGH THE NARROW OPENING IN THE CEILING THE FACE OF ESTELLA, WHITE WITH TERROR, WHILE FROM HER LIPS CAME THE STARTLING CRY, "OH! THIS IS TOO TERRIBLE!"

Dark Paul, THE TIGER KING; OR, Caught in His Own Trap.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "BOB ROCKETT," "FRED HALYARD,"
"WILL WILDFIRE," "SHADOWED,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.

"SAVE ME! Oh, save me!"

The cry thrilled on the listening ear of night, a woman's earnest, soul-stirring appeal for aid in dire extremity. The voice was rich, warm and musical as that of some prima donna of the lyric stage, and the heart of Ernest Delaine leaped in ardent response to its appealing tone.

He looked hastily around. The street was empty save himself. The dusky wings of midnight brooded over the roofs of the great city. Only a light in a remote window, only a carriage rolling by, testified to the life that lay dormant beneath the gloom of night.

"Save me! Oh, save me!"

That cry again! It came from the carriage which was moving rapidly past him.

"Stop!" cried the young man, with stern command, to the coachman, as he sprang toward the vehicle.

But the latter only plied his whip on the flying horses.

"Stop, or I'll fire!"

"Fire and be hanged!" and the long lash again curled over the head of the coachman.

But it fell not upon the horses. The sharp report of a pistol rung through the air. The whip-lash, half severed by the bullet, fell limp and helpless upon the hand that wielded it.

And now the young man's athletic powers served him in good stead. An alert leap, and his foot was upon the step of the flying vehicle, his hand had grasped a support, the door was flung wide open.

The vision he beheld was one to stir the soul of an anchorite.

A woman, whose beauty seemed almost supernatural in the dim light of the carriage lamp, lay pressed back on the front seat of the carriage, in the grasp of a powerful man, whose right hand was upon her mouth, repressing any further effort to call for help.

His face was almost demoniac in its fierce fury as he turned it upon the intruder.

"Hound! meddler!" came in a shrill hiss through his clinched teeth.

Loosing his hold of the woman he struck savagely at the intruding face, throwing his whole body forward in the effort to hurl Ernest back into the street.

But he reckoned without his host. The young man avoided the blow, and grasped the villain with his disengaged hand while yet the impetus of his effort carried him forward.

A quick, powerful jerk, given with all the vigor of a muscular arm, and the ruffian was flung headlong from the carriage, falling with a sickening sound upon the stony surface of the street.

The next instant Ernest had leaped into the carriage, closed the door, and was being whirled rapidly down the deserted avenue, the excited horses dashing madly onward, while fire flew from under their iron hoofs. Only a man of remarkable athletic powers could have performed the feat which he had so easily done.

"Have you settled him?" called the coachman, bending down from his perch.

"Yes, yes!" rejoined Ernest, taking instant advantage of the fellow's evident mistake.

"Yes; he is done for! Drive on!"

"Well, if this isn't a situation!" said the young man to himself, as the coachman continued his course apparently satisfied.

But the woman? She had not stirred since he entered the carriage. A glance at her face told him that she was insensible.

"What in the sun is to come of it all I don't see," he said, looking helplessly at the limp, extended figure, on which there fell a faint glow from the carriage lamp.

But his wavering glance became irresistibly fixed. It was not the sheening satin of her dress, the rich folds of purple and azure which enveloped that queenly form; nor yet the flash of gems which glittered from throat and fingers, and burned in the abundant mass of rich brown hair.

It was the face alone on which his eyes were

fixed, a face whose wonderful beauty of line and tint no pen could describe, no artist could reproduce.

Yet now its charm was half lost. The delicately-penciled brows, the slender nose and softly-rounded cheek, the firm chin and crimson line of the closed lips, needed, to complete their sum of beauty, the liquid glow of the deep brown eyes which must rest beneath those silken lashes, the contrast of pearly teeth to enhance the rich crimson of the lips, the full flush of life and expression now quenched in the mimic death of insensibility.

"Why, she is a queen! an angel! a— I have no language that will describe her!" cried Ernest, with rapture. "And to think of a fellow like me, with such a glorious prize on my hands! Why it would be enough to set me wild if I was one of your susceptible kind. What under heaven is the right thing to do?"

He lifted her in his arms to place her in a more comfortable position. His every nerve tingled with a new sensation as he clasped that lovely form. It seemed to him as if it would be heavenly if they could drive on this way forever, though it would not be so comfortable if the woman should prove to be dead, as she appeared.

The carriage continued to move rapidly on, the coachman apparently unaware of the strange change which had taken place within it, or that his former fare lay prostrate, dead perhaps, on the stony surface of the street, now far behind them.

Ernest sat back in momentary despair. He then grasped her white, slender hands, and began vigorously to chafe them. He had heard somewhere that this was useful in a case of fainting.

"Who would ever have thought that I, a stranger from the West, just arrived in this city, would have fallen upon such an adventure as this! Who can she be? If she would but open her eyes! Such beauty I never dreamed of."

He looked upward, and started with surprise to find two clear, bright brown orbs bent in a doubtful, undefined way upon him. Her hands were withdrawn from his grasp, a questioning look came into her face.

"Who are you?" she asked in a thrilling whisper. "Where is Dark Paul, the Tiger King? Oh! what has happened?"

"If you mean the villain who was in the carriage," answered Ernest, "he is now lying somewhere back here in the street, maybe with his face crushed, or his skull broken. I found him maltreating you, and gave him a fling he is likely to remember."

"Thanks! thanks! a thousand thanks!" she cried, in warm gratitude, seizing his hand and pressing it fervently between hers. "Oh! from what have you saved me! From what terror and torture!"

"Indeed, I am glad to have been able to serve you," he earnestly replied.

"But you!" she cried, still holding his hand, and bending her beautiful face until it almost touched his, while she spoke in an eager whisper, "but you, my preserver! Do you know the terrible danger you run? the imminent peril into which this act has thrown you? You must leave this city! No one lives who opposes that remorseless man! You must fly for your life!"

"I hardly think so," Ernest coolly replied. "I have just come here, and will be in no such great hurry to leave. And I have killed a grizzly bear hand to hand in my time; so I think I can manage your tiger."

"You do not know all, or you would not dare—" she began, a look of terror upon her unmatched features.

She ceased speaking, as if she had gone too far.

"Who are you?" she again asked. "Your name? I may be able to aid you."

There was something so eager, earnest, and thrilling in her tones that the young man quivered with a nervous sensation new to him.

"I am called Ernest Delaine," he replied. "I fear no one, neither man nor beast. Let him do his worst, I shall never tremble with dread of him. And now you owe me an explanation of this scene. Whom have I rescued? Why have you been assaulted?"

She drew up her tall form, a strange emotion marking her face.

"Who am I?" came in thrilling accents from her lips. "No, no! That I can never tell you! Seek not to pry into the mystery that envelops me. Your peril is great now. It would be doubled did I dare reveal the perilous story of my life!"

"Do not mind my peril," he began. "Of that I will take care."

"You must not know me! You must never see me after this fatal night!" she interrupted. "But, unseen, I will watch over you. I may save you from this terrible enemy."

The conversation was interrupted by the stopping of the carriage. The coachman descended from his perch and threw open the door.

"We have arrived," he said.

Ernest at once descended from the carriage, and held his hand to help the lady alight. A quick, comprehensive glance showed him that they were in front of a large stone edifice, flanked by a wall of some length on either side. The night was too dark to see more than this. His lady companion leaned confidently upon his arm, as he assisted her toward the broad flight of steps which he had determined to ascend, as if to follow out the adventure to the very end.

"Where have you brought me?" she whispered.

"Hush!" he warily replied. "You can trust to me. I will see that no harm comes to you."

Boldly ascending the broad flight of marble steps, Ernest, without hesitation, opened the front door of the mansion, and entered a wide hall, lined with variegated marbles.

The door of a large apartment stood open to the left. Ernest quickly drew the lady into this room, and closed the door behind them.

It was a large and luxuriously furnished apartment, upholstered in green velvet, upon which fell the light of a dimly burning gas-jet. Upon the rich carpet lay a thick Persian rug, which covered the center of the floor, and in which was woven the figure of a royal Bengal tiger. The lady started with affright when her eyes fell upon this figure.

"Great Heaven!" she cried. "What house is this? Oh! this is a fatal mistake!"

"Do not be alarmed," he interrupted her. "I am armed, and will protect you."

Her eyes, wide with fright, continued to survey the apartment. Suddenly she started forward, and seized a small ivory backed, and steel-clasped book that lay upon a center-table.

"That book!" she exclaimed. "This is fortunate indeed!"

She hid it beneath her cloak with a nervous haste, as though she had indeed gained a treasure, while her eyes sparkled with intense light.

Ernest watched her movements with surprise and curiosity. He then looked hastily around the room.

"Come! there is nothing here," he said, advancing to the door, which he endeavored to open.

It resisted his efforts! It was locked!

"My God! have you led me into this trap?" she piteously exclaimed, seizing his arm with both her trembling hands, while her eyes were fixed in beseeching glances upon his face.

She was answered in an unlooked-for manner. A harsh voice vibrated through the apartment.

"Yes, my royal lady, you are trapped. This young fool shall find what is the price of meddling."

The voice came from near the ceiling. There, at a small opening, appeared the villainous face of the coachman, plainly revealed in the light which Ernest had turned up to a bright blaze.

"Trapped!" cried the young man, fiercely.

Turning, he flung himself with all his strength against the door. It failed to yield. He ran to the windows. They were immovable. He glared around him like a caged lion.

A mocking laugh came from the ceiling.

"By the gods! I have missed you once to-night. I will try again."

The sharp report of a pistol accompanied these words. The face disappeared, but a jeering laugh showed that the bullet had again missed its mark. And, following the laugh, came a muffled sound, half-scream, half-roar, which vibrated with terrible significance throughout the house.

"Great Heaven!" cried the lady, clasping her hands in agony. "It is the tiger! We are lost!" Ernest stood gazing at her with distended eyes.

"No! no!" she suddenly exclaimed, springing joyfully to her feet. "I have the book! I have their secrets! We can defy them!"

CHAPTER II.

WAITING FOR AN ANSWER.

BULLETS have a bad habit of not stopping always at the point for which they are intended. Such was the case with the shot which Ernest had fired in the street at the coachman. It proved, in fact, a most eventful bullet. As a moving hand will set in action a long train of circumstances, so did that flying fragment of

lead produce effects of the utmost importance to the characters of our story.

We have said that Ernest, when startled by the call for help, saw no signs of life in the street save the carriage, and a light in a distant window. The flying bullet, after cutting the whip, flew straight for this light, rending its way through the window with a crash of splintered glass.

Within the apartment in question sat two persons, a gentleman and a lady.

The former was a large-framed, firm-faced personage. His countenance was by no means prepossessing, having prominent cheek-bones, and a long, high-bridged nose, while a sour expression seemed habitual to it. Yet the keen gray eyes, and the close lips, indicated a reserve energy, a stock of force ready for any critical occasion.

The lady was of middle age. She had been a beautiful woman in her youth, and yet retained much of her womanly charm. But her face was overlaid with an expression of sadness which seemed the work of years, as if some dread misfortune had, far back in her life, sapped its springs of happiness, and left only sorrow in its path.

"I have lost all hope," she said in a voice tinged with melancholy. "The years have dropped, one by one, into the ocean of eternity, and yet nothing comes back to me, no hope, no relief."

The gentleman was striding the apartment with a hasty, impatient step.

"I dunna see as there's any use in't," he remarked, in a strong Scotch accent. "And yet it will not do to despair. Of'n and of'n the light comes just when the gloom falls heaviest."

He was interrupted by the crashing of the glass, and by the fall of a large picture which hung against the opposite wall. Accompanying them sounded the sharp report of a pistol.

A slight scream of alarm came from the lady, but the gentleman's coolness remained unchanged.

"I doubt it isn't us it's meant for," he said, "e'en though it's splintered the glass an' cut the picture cord. But I think it's my duty to go see. I will not be long, Mrs. Hudson."

Seizing his hat he hastily quit the room, leaving the lady, who sat absently gazing upon the fallen picture. It was the portrait of a tall, well-built young man, dressed in a close-fitting costume which seemed adapted to athletic exercises, and which well displayed the vigor of a muscular frame. The right hand grasped a short, slender whip. The face was hard and stern, with something cruel and sinister in its expression.

A sudden shudder ran through the lady's frame. Her eyes became riveted upon the pictured countenance.

"That face? Here?" came in hissing accents from her lips. "In Doctor McDowell's office? What must I understand by this? Oh! is there hope for me in this strange discovery?"

A few minutes only had elapsed when the doctor returned, bearing in his sturdy arms the insensible form of a man.

The lady started back in terror. Had murder been committed?

"Ye must excuse me, Mrs. Hudson," said the unmoved doctor, as he laid his burden in an easy-chair. "There hasn't been bluidshed. The puir body has had a fall, I doubt."

As he spoke he had dexterously removed the man's coat, and pushed up his shirt sleeve. The fingers of the physician rested upon the pulse, while a questioning look came upon his face.

"I hope it is nothing serious," remarked Mrs. Hudson, recovering from her momentary alarm, and approaching nearer.

Suddenly the doctor was startled by a loud scream which came from her lips. Hastily loosing his hold of the man's wrist, he looked round, to perceive her standing with quivering lips and deathlike face, her extended hand pointing rigidly to the bared arm of the insensible figure.

"Look! look!" she cried in thrilling accents. "Ah! can I ever forget that mark?"

The doctor's searching gaze followed the direction of her pointing hand. There, on the fleshy part of the relaxed arm was a small brown mole, which bore a singular resemblance to some animal of the cat tribe.

"Do ye mean this?" asked the doctor, as he touched the spot.

"Yes! The tiger mark! Ah! well do I remember it! Do you not know that face, that cruel countenance?"

"No," he answered, curiously regarding her.

"See here!" she quickly rejoined, pointing to the fallen picture, and to the face of the insens-

ible man. "They are the same! How you came by that horrible portrait I cannot conceive. But you should know whom your own picture represents."

"No, no," he quickly replied. "I know no mair than the man in the moon. I cannot tell ye now the strange story aboot that picture, since there's matter o' mair moment at hand. But—"

"It is he!" she exclaimed. "It is Paul Terrol! It is he who has made my life a misery—who has robbed me of my son—who has slain in me all hope, trust, and happiness!"

"Paul Terrol!" cried the doctor, in intense surprise. "The saints be guid to us! Paul Terrol!—Then, by my soul, it is our turn now!"

With an alert movement the doctor opened a drawer and drew out some strong bandages. The next moment he was skillfully twining them around the limbs of the insensible man, who now showed some signs of returning consciousness.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed ere he was bound so firmly to the chair, that hardly a possible movement was left him.

Mrs. Hudson had sunk back into a seat, overcome by emotion and excitement. Her limbs shook as if in an ague.

Slowly the eyes of the invalid opened. For several seconds they gazed around in questioning doubt. Then they fell on the deathly white face of the lady, and a quick shudder ran through the bound frame.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a whispering tone. "That face—is it a dream?"

"No!" she exclaimed, starting impulsively up. "It is I—I whom you have robbed of the one treasure of her life!—Where is my boy—my Ernest?"

A slow, crafty smile curled the thin lips of the man; a look of cruel malignity came into his eyes.

"What know I of him? I am not your son's keeper."

"It was you who robbed me of him! You whose treacherous hand left me alone with a bare and desolate life! Tell me, I beg, I implore you! What have you done with my son?"

"I cannot tell you, and would not if I could," came in scornful tones from his set lips, as he made an effort to raise himself from the chair.

"Who has dared to bind me here?" he cried, on discovering his condition.

"I have. I, Fergus McDowell," replied the doctor, stepping forward. "Ye will not answer this puir mither, but ye shall answer me."

"I will be even with you for this!" cried the villain, writhing in his bonds, while a look of bitter hate came into his cat-like eyes.

"Vera well; but I'll e'en be even with you, first. Ye will not leave that chair till ye answer this leddy's questions."

"Who are you that has dared bind me?" demanded the infuriated captive.

"Ye dunna know me then, Paul Terrol. Mebbe ye will know this picture."

He raised the fallen picture, and held it before the bound man.

A strange look came into the eyes of the latter on observing it—a look in which surprise was immediately followed by dread. Some fear-inspiring memory seemed to connect itself with this portrait of his younger self.

"How came you by that picture?" he fiercely ejaculated, though his lips involuntarily trembled. "I know you not."

"But I know you," sternly rejoined the doctor, replacing the portrait, this time with its face to the wall.

A white speck, as if it were the corner of a paper hidden in the frame, showed itself, unseen by the doctor, but greedily observed by the captive.

"If I but had that fatal document!" he muttered, between his closed teeth. "Not for worlds would I have it fall into any hands but mine!"

Doctor McDowell turned again to him, after setting down the mysterious picture.

"Are ye ready to answer the leddy's questions?" he asked, in a cold, measured tone.

"What? Under compulsion? Taken advantage of in this way, and bound while insensible? Release me, and then I will talk with you. But I will never yield to force."

"Ye'll not answer then?"

"No! Never!"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Hudson," said the doctor, as he turned to the agitated lady. "I doubt but the fall hasna been guid for this mon's head. He doesn't seem right here," tapping his forehead significantly. "A little bluid-letting, I fancy—"

"What do you mean, doctor?"

He made no answer, but turned with professional coolness toward a cabinet by the wall, from which he took a case of instruments. He selected one of these, a fine, needle-like blade, whose point and edge he tried coolly upon his thumb nail.

"I fancy we'll bring the mon to his senses, Mrs. Hudson," continued the doctor, as he turned toward his captive.

This person sat motionless in the chair to which he had been bound. His lips were set, his eyes cold and inflexible. Evidently he was not one to yield easily to either force or persuasion.

It was no common face and form that Doctor McDowell looked upon, as he turned to his prisoner. The features were regular, and the face rather handsome than otherwise, but it was marked with an unusual firmness and energy. The thin and almost bloodless lips, and the large, protruding chin, told of a resolution that was backed by a fearless vigor. But the most marked features of the face were the eyes. These were not large, but they sparkled with a diamond-like luster, and had something of the peculiar fascinating power which we are apt to fancy dwells within the glittering orbs of the serpent.

The frame of the man was of medium size, but it seemed all brawn and muscle. The bared arm appeared to be but a knotted mass of sinews, with scarce a particle of flesh to give roundness to its irregular outline. Everything about him spoke of strength, endurance and energy, while there was a crafty expression upon his thin lips which showed that he could further his schemes by cunning as well as by strength.

"I am going to draw a little bluid," the doctor quietly remarked, as he placed a basin on the floor under the bared arm. "There are cases where phlebotomy is very necessary. I doubt but the fall has added the puir body's brain; but mebbe I can bring him back to his senses."

The captive writhed in his chair, while a bitter oath broke from his lips.

"He needs it," continued the doctor, in his measured manner. "When a mon swears in a leddy's presence, it a'most always shows that there's too much bluid. Keep still now, or ye might get hurt."

He had caught the man's arm in his slender fingers. But, slender as they were, they were like so many bars of steel. The arm was held as in a brace.

"A beautiful anatomical development!" cried the doctor, with professional admiration. "Beautiful! Quiet, now, my friend. If the lance should slip— Ah!"

A quick, skillful movement of the wrist; the fine lance was reddened at the point; a narrow stream of blood trickled down Paul Terrol's bared arm and fell with a hollow sound into the basin below. Mrs. Hudson had her hands before her face. She could not bear the sight.

The doctor coolly seated himself.

"I hope ye'll soon come to your senses," he remarked. "This will take the pressure from your brain. When ye are ready to answer this puir leddy's questions—"

"I cannot answer them!" hissed the prisoner.

"I know nothing about the boy."

"I see. It hasna had the effect. Keep cool, Mrs. Hudson. The mon won't bleed to death soon. He is guid for an hour yet. But it doesna matter. We're in no sort of hurry."

He calmly opened a newspaper and commenced quietly to read. To all appearance he had forgotten the presence of his captive.

Mrs. Hudson sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her face deathly pale, while dark rings had started out around her eyes.

The prisoner's lips were firmly closed and his hands clinched. Not a word came from his lips, but his eyes fairly blazed.

The room was still as death, save for the drip, drip, drip of the flowing blood as it trickled in a slender stream from the arm and fell into the basin beneath.

CHAPTER III.

THE PATH TO SAFETY.

We left Ernest Delaine and his strangely beautiful companion, in a most dubious situation, locked within a room of the questionable mansion to which they had been conveyed.

The small book which she held, and from which she seemed confident of discovering some method of escape from their perilous situation, closed with a secret spring. But she appeared to understand its action. A touch of her finger and it flew open. It was apparently a sort of

bound tablet, with ivory surfaced paper, which, however, was blank, there being no trace of writing upon it.

"There is nothing there," cried Ernest, who had been curiously and hopefully following her movements. "I thought it very odd if such a villain would leave evidence against him lying around loose in that fashion. We must get out of this den by some other means."

He hurried again to the windows. They were closed with strong, iron-bound shutters, bolted firmly on the inside. But this bolt was not their only fastening. On its being withdrawn they failed to yield to the pushing hand. Some equally firm support held them on the outside. Ernest set his strong shoulder against them and pushed with all his strength. It was in vain. They firmly resisted the youthful vigor of his strong muscles.

Meanwhile his companion was otherwise engaged. Smiling to herself at his hasty remark about the book, she held its first open page near her lips, and breathed upon it until the whole page was moist. But nothing yet appeared upon its smooth surface.

She next held it near the gas jet, the ivory-like material glittering in the light as it grew warm with the heat of the burner. And now it was no longer so purely white as before. Dark characters rose into view upon the white surface, at first pale, but rapidly growing black and clear. Ernest, who had returned from his unsuccessful effort upon the shutter, gazed with surprise at this metamorphosis.

"But what does it all mean?" he asked, after vainly striving to decipher the written characters. "There is no sense or meaning in it."

"It is a cipher," she answered. "Not a very difficult one, however. And fortunately I have the key to it. I know more of Dark Paul's secrets than even he imagines."

She seated herself at the table, and began to slowly decipher the mysterious writing which had so strangely sprung into view upon the tablet. All her fear and nervous excitement seemed to have been exchanged for confidence.

Ernest, however, was not so easily quieted. He roamed the apartment like a caged animal, examining its every feature with critical eyes, and seeking something which might serve as a weapon with which to break through the obstruction of the locked door or windows. They did not impress him as too strong for him to open a passage through them, if he could but gain some heavy weight with which to attack their weaker panels.

But a parlor is not a work-shop. The chairs, the tables, the stools alike were light and slender. They would crumble into fragments in his hands under such an assault as that he wished to make. The only possibly available missile was the marble top of a small table, which stood at one end of the room. And that would perhaps break into fragments under the work to which he designed to put it.

"I'd give a high premium now for a blacksmith's hammer," he muttered, as he seized this novel weapon of assault. "But I will have to see what virtue there is in marble and muscle. When you can't get what you want you must use what you have."

The next instant, with a surge that shook the house to its foundations, the heavy weight was driven like a battering-ram against the strong door. It rattled with the blow, and there was a sound as of splintering wood. But the only visible result was a deep dent in the firm wood.

And from a distance came again that snarling scream which they had heard before, the frightful tones of an enraged tiger.

Ernest again lifted the heavy weapon. He stood like a young athlete, balancing the oval mass as though he grasped but a feather in his hands. He drew back to give the blow all the vigor of his powerful muscles.

"Hold!" came the voice of the lady, as she hastily rose.

But her warning cry was too late. Again the very house seemed to tremble with the force of a terrific blow. The splintering wood gave way before it. A hole that the hand could have passed through was broken in the yielding panel of the door.

But, another sound followed. The treacherous stone, shattered by the blow, broke into two equal fragments, of which one fell with a crash to the floor. With a bitter exclamation of disgust Ernest flung the other half down upon it.

From the opening in the wall again came that jeering laugh. The young man, vexed and furious, in an instant had his pistol in his hand, its muzzle directed toward the face of the coachman, who had again appeared there. But the latter quickly disappeared, and the trap shot

back into its place, leaving the wall seemingly continuous.

"At any rate I have made a beginning," he said. "There is weight enough yet in these bits of marble to open out that aperture, if the confounded stone does not break into slivers. Here goes for it anyhow. I will go through if I have to take a penknife to it."

"There is no occasion," she quietly replied. "I have found a better way."

She tapped the tablet significantly with her finger.

"Ah!" he quickly cried. "You have made it out, then? There is something in it, after all?"

"Yes. Sit down here for a few minutes. I wish to talk with you."

She had suddenly become the collected one of the two. Ernest's nerves were tingling with excitement as he took the chair to which she pointed.

It was a strange situation. After midnight, in that mysterious house, imprisoned in a palace-like apartment, surrounded by foes for all they knew to the contrary, and with those occasional tiger screams to give a new element of horror to the situation; it was enough to make one's blood curdle. And to Ernest there was another element of the mysterious added to the strangeness of his situation. The peculiar circumstances surrounding his rescue of this unknown woman, her half revelations, her unusual beauty, the richness of her attire, the glitter of her jewels, her terror followed by her present cool confidence. What to make of it all he could not imagine.

"Listen," she said, her musical voice vibrating through the closed apartment. "Perhaps you do not know who Paul Terrol is."

"I have heard his name, somewhere," he replied. "I do not remember just where, at present."

"He is a man of dark secrets," she continued. "Mystery and crime surround him on every side. There are reasons why I should say no more. But we must make our escape from this establishment before he returns."

"I am perfectly agreed with you on that point," answered Ernest, with a satirical smile.

"This house is full of secrets," she continued. "Doors and windows are only a part of its means of movement. You have seen that opening near the ceiling. That is evidence that we are not the first prisoners who have been confined here. Fortunately, there are other openings, hidden traps, which the master of the house supposes are known only to himself, but some of which this tablet has fortunately revealed to me."

"Lucky tablet!" exclaimed Ernest, with enthusiasm. "How did you ever learn how to read it?—There! there! I don't want to pry into your secrets. But hadn't we best use one of those convenient traps as soon as possible?"

"A minute or two more," she replied. "I have not finished yet."

He reseated himself, and gazed with renewed curiosity upon her speaking features. She resumed her communication.

"That is not all that this fortunate discovery gives us. It holds other secrets which it would be ruin to Paul Terrol to have known. I am aware of some of them, but here we have the evidence in his own hand." She tapped the open book with her tapering finger. "He will not dare injure us while this book remains in our hands."

"But if he has us and the book too?"

"That is to what I am coming. It is not positive that we will both escape from this house. But one may, and that one is most likely to be you."

Ernest nodded, but he quietly resolved that it would be very peculiar circumstances which would make him desert his fair companion.

"I wish, therefore, to have you take charge of this book. If it should be I that escape, and you that remain prisoner, I will know how to release you. But if it be you that escape you might be powerless to rescue me from this man's hands. But while the book remains in your power he dare not injure me. Even if you cannot read its secrets, others might, and he would fear to leave himself so in your power."

"I see," replied Ernest, as he received the book from her hands. "I had better take the risk than you, that is certain. But how am I to open it if it becomes necessary?"

She showed him the concealed spring by which its opening was governed.

"Very good," he replied, with an air of satisfaction, as he placed the book in an inner pocket. "That's one hold on our friend. If I am the one to escape you may be sure that I

will work like a Trojan to release you. But let us waste no more precious time here."

"It is not time yet," she rejoined. "Our escape must not be discovered too soon. They may enter by the door and find that we are gone."

"I calculate not," he answered. "They have locked it from the outside. Let me see if I cannot lock it from the inside."

Quickly seizing one of the fragments of the marble table top he struck it with all his strength against the inner side of the lock. A rattling sound accompanied the blow. Another fragment of the marble broke off and fell to the floor.

"I fancy I have put that lock out of order," he grimly said. "And now for our friend, the coachman."

Seizing the small fragment of marble, he waited patiently, with his eyes fixed upon the trap in the ceiling. He shrewdly concluded that this last blow would bring the spy to the look out.

Nor was he mistaken. In a minute more a small square in the wall silently receded, leaving a blank space. Ernest quickly turned down the gas to a dim gleam, and noiselessly waited. The next moment the face of the coachman appeared, looking curiously about the darkened room.

Simultaneously with his appearance the dangerous missile, hurled with all the force of Ernest's arm, was flying through the air toward that villainous face. The aim was a true one. It would have struck the spy in the center of his leering countenance, but that he caught sight of Ernest's movement just in time, and jerked back his head. Not quickly enough, however. Instead of taking him in the face it caught the top of his shaggy head, and made a long, torn, jagged wound in his scalp, that was likely to prove a vivid reminder to him not to venture too much in the future.

"The third time tells," cried Ernest, as the trap quickly closed after the discomfited spy.

"And now we have no time to lose," he quickly continued. "Let us hasten, Miss—Excuse me, but you must give me some name to know you by."

"Call me Miss West, then. Estelle West, if you like the name."

He looked quizzically at her. Something in her tone gave him the idea that it was a name assumed for the occasion. But he said nothing.

She had risen from her seat and approached the side of the room. Here was a small recess, flanked by one of the deep set windows. She stooped and felt about the wall for a short interval.

"Come here," she called to him, in a cautious tone.

Taking his hand she drew him close into the recess, and arranged her own dress so that it should not protrude upon the floor. Then stooping again she touched the spring for which she had previously been seeking.

Immediately there was a slight crackling sound, and a sensation as if the floor was giving way beneath them. In fact, the portion of the floor upon which they stood, carpet and all, had parted from the remainder, and was sinking bodily into the depths below the room.

A queer sensation came upon Ernest as he felt this unlooked-for movement. He involuntarily threw his arm around his fair companion.

"You are not afraid?" he whispered.

"No," she replied, as she quietly disengaged herself from the embrace.

The trap had ceased to descend. She stepped from it, he following her example. It immediately reascended, with the same noiselessness, and resumed its former position.

They were in utter darkness.

"Do you know where we are? Can you lead the way?" he asked, feeling for her hand in the gloom.

"I fear not," she doubtfully replied, "without a light."

"That reminds me. I have matches."

The next minute he had struck a light, and held up the blazing match, with a curious feeling to learn what kind of a place they were in.

The light revealed dark, heavy stone walls, with long and narrow passages, sinking into dark shadows at their extremity.

They were evidently in the underground region of the house.

"This way," she said, leading him forward. "I think I can remember the directions."

The match soon flickered and went out. But he quickly lit another, and they passed cautiously on through the ample cellars, her face having a strangely pale, set expression in the dim light.

She seemed as if filled with some sudden apprehension of the result.

"Ah! here are stairs leading upward," she joyfully said, in guarded tones. "Now I know my way."

They carefully ascended the stairs, which had a most unfortunate tendency to creak, no matter how carefully they trod.

In a minute or two, however, the door at the top was reached. Ernest put his hand on it to open it. But at that same instant his foot unluckily slipped on a moist step, throwing him slightly forward, so that the door was flung violently open. It struck the wall behind it with a sound that reverberated through the house.

"Oh mercy, how unlucky!" she exclaimed. "Come, quick, quick! We have not a second to lose."

Their hands were still clasped, from the time he had taken hers in the underground passage. She drew him hastily forward.

And none too soon. Footsteps sounded in the house around them. The floor creaked under their hasty feet. A room was crossed, and they entered a wide passage leading through the house. The front door was but a short distance in front.

But at this same moment three or four men appeared in the passage behind them, hastily pursuing. They ran quickly forward. They were within a few paces of the door—when it opened, and there stepped inward, closing their only path to safety, the dreaded figure of Paul Terrol, the Tiger King!

CHAPTER IV.

THE END OF DR. MCDOWELL'S EXPERIMENT.

STILL the blood flowed from the slight incision in Paul Terrol's arm, and dropped with that same ominous tinkle into the basin below. The bottom of this was already covered with the red life fluid. It was slowly creeping up its sides.

With firmly closed lips the prisoner sat, his piercing eyes fixed with a revengeful glare upon the figure of the unmoved doctor, who sat perusing his newspaper as unconcerned as though the incident of bleeding a man to death was an every day occurrence in his life.

Mrs. Hudson could not view it with such professional coolness. Her face was deathly pale, her eyes distended with fear and nervous excitement. She clutched the chair with a hard grasp, as if to hold herself back from springing up and flying to the assistance of the bleeding man. Much as she feared and hated him her womanly nature could not let her rest easy under such circumstances.

"Don't let your nerves get the best o' ye, my dear madam," warned the doctor, as he saw her emotion. "Why, this is a beautiful experiment—beautiful! Our friend in the chair has a verra remarkable muscular development. And it is verra interesting to see his nerve. I take quite a professional interest in it. I dinna ken how much bluid a mon can lose and keep his nerve, but an hour or so will tell."

"Why, you cold-blooded butcher!" cried the prisoner, in a sudden rage, "do you intend to keep me here bleeding by the hour?"

"That depends; that depends," coolly assured the doctor. "If I can take the bluid from your brain sooner, why all well. But ye must coom back to your senses, and answer this puir leddy's questions, before I can be satisfied that the pressure is off your brain."

A fierce oath broke from the captive's lips. He struggled to break loose from his bonds. The muscles stood out upon his bared arm until they looked as if they would break through the skin. But the bandages failed to give way. Dr. McDowell's work was not to be easily overcome.

"I know nothing of the woman's brat," he fiercely ejaculated. "He may be dead or hanged for all I know to the contrary. But Heaven forget me if I do not amply revenge myself for this night's work!"

The doctor smiled satirically. But Mrs. Hudson sprang nervously from her chair.

"You stole him! You, Paul Terrol!" she cried, in a tone that was almost a scream. "You crept into my house, like a snake that you are! You abused my trusting nature, and you stole my child from me, you thief and villain! Give me back my child! Oh, give me back my child!"

Her voice vibrated with intense emotion. It seemed enough to move the heart of a stone. But he only shrugged his shoulders, while a sneering smile came upon his thin lips.

"There is no need to make a scene, my dear woman," he heartlessly replied. "As for

your boy, I suppose he has been lynched before now, by some vigilance committee in the West. I think I have seen the rope that was twisted for him. I am sorry that I did not send you a piece for a memento."

This heartless insult was rather more than the impassive doctor could bear. The hot Scotch blood flamed into his cheek. He sprang from his chair, with clinched fists, as if with intent to punish the soulless villain.

"That's right," said the latter, with quiet scorn. "You have the advantage of me now. Make the most of it."

Doctor McDowell drew back, with a slight sense of shame.

"You had better look to your lady friend," continued the captive, with a most insulting significance in his last words.

The doctor—repressing an impulse to strike him in the face—turned hastily toward Mrs. Hudson. Her face had grown deathly white at Paul Terrol's insulting words. His heartless innuendoes about her son redoubled the nervous strain under which she was suffering. She staggered for a moment, and then, just as the doctor turned to her, she fell heavily to the floor, in a death-like insensibility.

He ran hastily to her assistance, lifted her, and placed her in a reclining position upon a lounge.

"Soulless ruffian!" he hissed, as he passed the prisoner in search of some remedy to recall the fainting lady to her senses.

The same scornful smile curled Dark Paul's thin lips.

In a minute more, forgetting his bleeding captive, Doctor McDowell was bent over the insensible lady, in efforts to restore her vanished senses.

He was aroused from this occupation by the sound of another fall. Quickly turning his head he saw that the bound captive had managed to throw himself and the chair which held him over on the floor.

"Verra well," smiled the doctor. "If ye prefer that posture, I am sure ye are welcome to enjoy it."

Yet he miscalculated the strength of his chair and the vigor and cunning of his captive. The latter had brought a severe strain upon the legs and arms of the chair at the moment of throwing it over, pressing them outward with all his force. The effort, together with the impetus of the fall, had proved too much for the strength of the chair. One of its arms gave way, and broke out of its socket, releasing the right arm of the captive.

Dr. McDowell had no sooner turned again to his insensible patient than the quick-motioned prisoner drew a knife from his pocket, opened it with his teeth, and rapidly drew the keen-edged blade across the strong bandages which had so long confined him.

In less space than it takes to tell it he was free, and on his feet behind the unconscious doctor, with a most demoniac expression upon his face, as the keen-bladed knife gleamed in his hand.

But a second thought appeared to succeed his first murderous impulse. His eyes fell upon the picture, which still stood, face inward, against the wall. The white spot on the back of the frame, which had before taken his attention, now seemed to draw him with an irresistible attraction. A quick light of exultation broke into his eyes as he made a stealthy step toward the much-coveted prize.

All this had passed so quickly that scarce ten seconds had elapsed from the moment he had drawn the knife to that in which he now moved toward the mysterious paper in the picture frame.

At this instant Dr. McDowell again turned his head. His quick ear had caught a suspicious sound behind him. In a moment he was on his feet, mistaking the movement of his escaped prisoner, and the object of the blade which yet glittered in his hand.

"Back, murderer!" he ejaculated, facing him. "You have broken loose, then? Come not near me, or I will let bluid from another vein."

He brandished the keen lance, which had not left his hand. There was that in his firm attitude, in the hard, alert expression of his eye, in the set of his lips, that showed Paul Terrol that he had no weak foe to deal with in Fergus McDowell.

He withdrew a step, still clutching the knife.

"You have taken a most unmanly advantage of me to-night," he hissed. "Only that I have some shadow of respect for that poor fool of a woman, I would try, now, and on this spot, which of us two is the better man. But it is only for the time. No man insults or injures

Dark Paul Terrol, and escapes scot free. You have had your hour. Mine will come."

"Do your worst, villain. Now or at any time," returned the doctor, with recovered coolness. "Ye have deeply injured this puir woman. Ye shall redress her, by the gods ye shall! Fergus McDowell swears that. At our next meeting there shall be no weak nerved woman to interfere."

With a sardonic smile Paul Terrol replaced the knife in his pocket, and turned quickly toward the door. He apparently laid himself open to a sudden assault from his foe. But the latter knew well that the senses of the tiger-tamer were always on the alert, even if he had entertained any idea of a treacherous assault.

The next minute the freed captive had left the room. His steps were heard upon the stairs, as he descended toward the street. That strange midnight adventure was over.

The doctor turned again toward his insensible patient, in whose face some faint signs of returning consciousness were visible. He resumed his efforts for her recovery.

Meanwhile Dark Paul Terrol was hastening, with rapid steps, along the midnight streets of the city, which seemed utterly deserted at that point. His face was set in a stern, revengeful expression. His eyes blazed as remembrance of the former adventure of that eventful night returned to him.

"To be dragged from my own carriage, and flung like a log into the street!" he hissed, as a sharp pain in his head told of the injury he had received. "And to be baffled in my plans by that meddling fool—whatever he was! He may hide himself in the depths of the earth, and I will find him out. I have made two foes to-night. Little they know what it is to make an enemy of Paul Terrol."

He stopped in his swift career. His arm was still bleeding. Quickly removing a fragment of the linen bandage which still encircled his ankle, he bound it as tightly as he could about the lance wound in his arm. The loss of blood had not been without its effect. He felt weak and unnerved. Only rage had until now kept him up.

But the blood-letting had served him in another way. He had received a severe concussion from his fall in the street. Dr. McDowell's ironical words were based upon the truth. The flow of blood had relieved a pressure upon his brain. In this respect it had done him a useful service.

A half-hour's rapid walk took him beyond the built-up limits of the city. He was now in a street bordered, here by open fields, there by the mansion of some citizen who preferred the open air beyond the city limits.

As he proceeded these mansions became less frequent. Finally the faint light of the moon showed before him an open country, with only thinly-scattered edifices upon its broad expanse.

One of these was near him. Within a high stone wall, that inclosed a considerable space, could be seen the roof and upper walls of an extensive building. It seemed to be built of stone, and appeared pretentious in its size and the architectural adornments which even the faint moonlight revealed.

Pushing open the broad-valved gates which occupied the center of this wall he entered the inclosure. A stone-slabbed pavement led up to the wide front of the house. In the center of this broad steps ascended to a high framed door, on each side of which stood a gas-lamp, supported on the figure of a crouching tiger. It was the same door by which Ernest Delaine and Estelle West had entered that mansion an hour before.

Dark Paul walked up to it with the tread of a master. As he reached the door, and inserted his key to open it, unexpected sounds from within met his ears. There was a noise of rushing footsteps, which seemed to approach the door.

"There is something wrong within!" he muttered. "Has Lulu escaped?"

The next moment he had thrown open the door and stepped within. A start of surprise arrested his steps. Quick-witted as he was he had instantly taken in the significance of the scene before him.

There, in the center of the dimly lighted passage, was the woman who had been lately wrested from his grasp, accompanied by a stranger whom he instantly guessed to be his late assailant.

Behind these came four men, who broke into a cry of warning on seeing him.

"Stop them! They are escaping!" came from the lips of the coachman, whose face was

streaked with long lines of blood, that flowed from the deep wound in his head.

The fugitives involuntarily paused on perceiving this addition to the number of their foes. The face of the lady grew deathly pale.

"Paul Terrol!" she muttered.

Ernest caught the name. He looked warily to right and left, and then dashed forward at this new foe. In their situation nothing but boldness and quickness would answer.

Estelle sought to follow him, but her arm was at that moment caught by one of their pursuers, and she was dragged back into the hall.

Another of them grasped the shoulder of the young man. But he reckoned without his host, for in a moment Ernest had him by the shoulder, had jerked him around in front of him, and with a skillful trip extended him prostrate on the marble floor.

Leaping over the fallen body he dashed to the encounter with Paul Terrol, who was warily advancing.

The two men were not unevenly matched. Dark Paul, as we have said, was all sinew and muscle. In a long struggle he would have worn out almost any antagonist. But, Ernest was more than his equal in size, and possessed of unusual agility.

He had, in fact, a special advantage just now, in the temporary weakness of his antagonist. A quick, impulsive grappling; a hasty struggle; and then the Tiger King was flung bodily over the shoulder of his foe, and fell with a thud to the floor.

Ernest turned back. The companion of his flight was a prisoner. Four men confronted him.

"Fly!" she cried. "You cannot rescue me Fly! and remember!"

She was right. He turned again, and dashed through the open door.

CHAPTER V.

IN QUEST OF AN ADVENTURE.

A BRIGHT morning succeeded the eventful night in which had occurred the incidents we have described.

Within his room at the hotel sat Ernest Delaine, lost in deep thought. He had abundant reason for reflection. He had arrived in that city from the Far West, late on the previous day, and had taken a room at the hotel, for he was without an acquaintance in all that wilderness of pleasant homes. To pass away the lonely hours he had gone to one of the city theaters. This had kept in to a late hour, and on leaving it he had somehow missed his way. It was while seeking to place himself right again that he heard the startling cry that led to such a strange adventure.

He had certainly put his foot in it. The evening before the whole city had not a point of interest for him; now it was suddenly alive with interest.

How strangely he had become connected with that beautiful and richly attired woman, whom such a deep mystery surrounded! And who was this Dark Paul Terrol, who bore such an ominous title as the Tiger King? Some faint glimmer of remembrance was struggling through the young man's brain. Surely that man was not quite unknown to him.

But such thoughts as these only floated remotely through his mind. There were more immediate interests which weighed heavily upon him. His fair companion of the night's adventure, Estelle West as she had named herself, was still a prisoner in the hands of her dreaded enemy. She trusted to him to rescue her. A look of resolution marked his face, as he said to himself: "I will not fail her. I have risked my life for a favorite dog before now. I would be a craven if I refused to give it for such a woman."

But how was he to act? The most obvious mode seemed to be to warn the police, and make a descent upon the mansion which held her captive. Yet there were doubts in his mind as to the efficacy of this plan. Paul Terrol was no common villain, and might have resources at his command that would defy the police. No doubt he would expect such a descent, and would prepare for it.

And besides, Ernest shrunk from any such method. He was sufficiently interested in the fair captive to wish to keep all the credit of rescuing her to himself. Could he not do it? She had declared that the possession of that mysterious book was a sure key to her safety.

Ernest drew the strange book from the pocket in which he had placed it on the previous night. He gazed long and intently at its cover of white marble as if he sought to read its secrets by some clairvoyant vision.

In the center of the back was a monogram, traced in gold upon the white. But it was so intricate that he could not make out the letters included within the involved figure. As he looked, however, an odd idea came into his mind. The lines of the monogram took a new shape. Gradually the figure of a tiger formed itself to his eye, strangely evolved from the twisting lines of the intricate figure.

"Dunce take him!" cried Ernest. "He seems to be tiger all through. I would give something neat to see all that is hidden under this little bit of fun."

He touched the spring which Estelle had shown him. The strong clasp flew open. The thick ivory-like leaves of the book lay wide before him.

As before they appeared utterly blank. The figures which he had seen there during the night were gone. Not a shadow dimmed the pure white of the polished leaves.

But, fortunately, he had learned the mystery of that strange tablet. Lighting the gas he breathed upon the leaves, and then held them up to the heat of the flame, as he had seen his fair companion do.

The surface darkened. Letters came out one by one. In a minute or two it was covered with faint lines of writing. But it was all in that mysterious cipher, which had no more meaning for him than if it had been so much Chocaw.

With a gesture of vexation he pursued the same process with the remaining leaves. All the dozen leaves of the tablet were closely covered with cipher writing, or with figures of various sorts. Although he failed to make any meaning out of this complicated medley of letters, yet a certain significance began to arise in his mind. There were various diagrams, and some peculiar emblematic figures, mingled with the writing, from which he drew important inferences.

On the first page of the tablet was drawn, in faint gold lines, the outlines of a tent-like figure. It was not a drawing, however, but a mere tracing in a few inlaid lines. Not content to cease while a bare hope remained, he subjected this page to the same process, breathing upon its surface and exposing it to the heat of the gas jet.

As he looked dark outlines appeared within the faintly-drawn tent. They deepened under the influence of the heat. In a minute more there was plainly revealed a skillful drawing of a human figure.

It was, in fact, the counterpart of the portrait in Doctor McDowell's office. Paul Terrol, in his younger days, was strikingly pictured on the white page. It was the same cold, pitiless face, the same glittering eyes. In his hand he held a slender whip. But this picture differed from the other in that it showed on the ground the crouching form of a tiger, on whose head was placed the foot of the man. In the background some cages appeared. Around them the gold-traced outlines curved like a tent.

"Aha!" cried Ernest, after a searching examination of the figure. "I have him now. He masked under another name then. But that face? Who could mistake that? Come, come, Master Paul Terrol, lion-tamer, tiger king, or whatever you please to call yourself, I know you now. And I have a score to settle with you a little longer than that of last night's work. I'd give something to know the mystery which the fair Estelle wishes to conceal. But, no matter; it is time I was moving to her aid."

This was easier said than done, as Ernest discovered when he had sallied forth in quest of his adventure. In his movements of the night before he had become so mixed up in the various streets as to quite lose his way, and he now had the very vaguest idea as to what course he should take in search of Dark Paul Terrol's mansion.

Nor did the process of asking his way help him much. He described the house he was in search of to several policemen, but none of them could recognize it from his description.

"Either they are stupid, or I am," he muttered, shrugging his shoulders. "Let me see if my gentleman is immortalized in the Directory."

But the City Directory proved of no better avail. Paul Terrol's name was not in it.

"There is only one thing to do," he said to himself. "The house was on the edge of the city. That much is sure. I'll surround the whole city but what I find it. Anyhow it's not such a big place but what a wild western walker like me can circumnavigate it in less than a lifetime."

Setting out in the direction which appeared

to him the most favorable to his purpose, he walked briskly onward, his young blood tingling in the fresh morning air, his heart beating just a little more quickly than usual, at the thought of the possible peril before him.

He felt in his pistol pocket. The weapon which he had carefully loaded and placed there was all right.

"I hardly think I will back down again before a crew of awkward hounds, like those I met last night," he grimly resolved. "Only for fear of shooting Estelle I would have tried the virtue of a few bullets then. Folks used to call me a sure shot."

He was now in a street of high-roofed, brick residences. It was a wide, cleanly paved avenue, the houses on each side indicating comfort and refinement, if not wealth. As he moved hastily on a gentleman and lady left the door of one of these houses, and walked down the high steps to the pavement. They turned down the street so as to meet him face to face.

The gentleman was a man of middle height and rather slender figure. He had a spare, Scotch face, with sour but resolute expression. He was dressed well, but in clothes of an old-fashioned cut, as if he was one who despised all new-fangled modern notions in dress.

The lady was of good figure, and tastefully dressed, but her features were hidden by a close veil.

All these particulars came to Ernest at a glance. He paid no further attention to these persons, but walked on with his brisk and springy step.

An unexpected and thrilling scream from the lady roused the young man from this impassiveness. He hastily turned. She had thrown up her veil and was gazing upon him with distended eyes and a face of death-like pallor. There was something in that pain-wrought face that caused his heart to leap with a sudden thrill, a strange emotion for which he could not account.

The next instant her eyes closed and she tottered. Ernest threw out his arm and caught her, just as she was falling to the ground.

"Thank ye," said the gentleman, as coolly as if this was an everyday occurrence with him. "The poor body's been badly worked up of late, and she hasna no nerves, to speak of. I canna see what gave her this start, though. Will ye kindly help me wi' her into the house?"

Ernest complied without replying.

His eyes were fixed with a strange sense of attraction upon that pallid and insensible face. Who could she be? She had been looking at him—had that anything to do with her scream, and the fainting fit which followed?

"I am verri much obleeged," remarked the gentleman, when their charge had been deposited upon a sofa in the parlor. "I won't keep ye any longer. It's only a touch o' faintness. I'm a doctor, and well know how to bring the leddy to."

At this pointed invitation to go Ernest could not linger longer, though it was with a feeling of regret that he took his eyes from that pallid face. It seemed so marked with the pain of a life's grief, and yet so beautiful withal; the beauty of a rich soul and a noble nature.

With a last look he walked to the door, the doctor following him with his eyes, but making no movement to accompany him.

"A confoundedly impolite and hard-headed old fellow," muttered Ernest, on regaining the street. "I wouldn't ask a dog to get out of doors in that fashion. Particularly a dog which had just done me a service. Who is he, anyhow?"

He looked at the window. It bore a doctor's sign: "Fergus McDowell, M. D."

"Scotch to the backbone, I'll bet high on that. And likely sound as an oak knot at heart, though craggy enough outside. He looks like that sort. But, hang him, I wanted to know more about that woman. Why did she scream and faint at the sight of me? What is it in her face that attracts me so strangely? Can it be that—"

He relapsed into silence. Strange thoughts were working in his mind. His whole early life was unfolding before him, in a long panorama, of which the early parts were dim and shaded, only the later portions clear and defined.

His brisk step had become slow and uncertain.

He was now far from the center of the city. Twenty minutes more brought him to the edge of the thickly built-up region. The houses became more scattered. Open spaces appeared between them. He continued his walk for some time longer. The country was becoming

more and more open. Here a short block of houses, here a single mansion, there an open field, replaced the close, serried rows of buildings which he had left behind him.

But none of them bore any resemblance to the house he was seeking, and of which he had taken keen observation, after his escape on the night before.

Inquiry now proved more profitable. A roadside laborer told him that there was such a house about a mile over, on another street.

"A big, sprawlin' sort o' place, wid a great stone wall. Looks as if the owner was afeared it might sprawl too fur, and wanted to keep it in."

"That's it," answered Ernest, starting off at his previous brisk pace in the direction indicated.

Ten minutes brought him within sight of the house. It was undoubtedly the one of which he was in search. A single look told him that.

In five minutes more he stood before the broad gateway, the gates of which were wide open. Paul Terrol's mansion was before him.

He stood a minute keenly surveying the edifice. Then he walked unhesitatingly forward and up the wide steps. He pulled the bell-handle with a vigorous jerk. Evidently the pealing bell must have said to those inside: "That person, whoever he is, means business."

After a minute the door opened. There appeared the villainous face of the coachman, who scowled with surprise and anger on seeing who was there.

"Tell your master that I wish to see him," Ernest remarked, in a commanding tone.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM THE PAN INTO THE FIRE.

IN a small but beautifully furnished apartment of Dark Paul Terrol's extensive mansion sat two persons, the villainous master of the habitation himself, and his fair captive, Estelle West.

Bright and pretty as was the room, it was the beauty of a prison. Those sweeping lace curtains, which let the sunlight through the narrow windows, concealed the fact that the sashes of these windows were made of iron instead of wood, and that these iron sashes were immovably fixed in their grooves. No iron-barred prison cell could have been more difficult to escape from. The door was of strong oak, with a lock that would have secured a dungeon portal. It was the hand of iron in the glove of silk. The rich adornments of the room were a sheer mockery of its obvious intention.

But, imprisoned as she knew herself to be, Estelle displayed none of her terror of the previous night. Her coral lips curled in scorn. A look of disdain replaced the dread in her bright brown eyes.

"It is only the fools who show their hands too plainly," he said, with his hard, cruel smile. "One would have thought that you would have learned wisdom by experience."

"I have," she calmly replied. "Though it may be that part of my experience has come rather late."

"A wise woman would have denounced first and threatened afterward," he cuttingly answered. "Did you not know whom you had to deal with, my fair traitress?"

"Yes, with a villain, a murderer, a wretch whose soul is stained with every crime!" she ejaculated, her cheeks blazing with sudden passion.

He laughed softly, while his fingers quietly tapped the chair, as if he was keeping time with her denunciations.

"Why not add, a tiger-tamer?" he asked, with that same hard smile.

"A wretch who is only fit to consort with tigers, which are beasts of his own blood."

He continued his soft laugh.

"You are right, my dear Estelle," he said. "I keep one here for my private enjoyment—my pretty Lulu, the pride of the jungles. But it seems that I am to have the care of another, whom I will have to watch more closely than Lulu."

"Whom do you mean?"

"My bright Estelle, the Star of the West. She has lately developed tigerish proclivities. It will be necessary to keep her in the pretty cage to which I have been obliged to consign her."

The disdainful smile again filled her eyes.

"You know why I have not denounced you, years ago," she began. "You have always taken an unfair advantage of me. But I care for nothing now. Justice must be done, though I wring my own heart in doing it."

"When you get the opportunity," he replied.

"When Paul Terrol's fingers close they do not easily reopen."

"Your scheme has not worked with its usual success this time," she calmly rejoined. "I have a friend at liberty."

"You mean that fellow who escaped me last night?"

She nodded assent.

"And do you weakly imagine that he will continue to escape me? I owe the young gentleman a debt or two, which I will not fail to repay." The glittering glare came again into his eyes. "Or perhaps you fancy that he will bring the police upon me?"

She deigned not to reply.

"What care I for the police?" he laughed, scornfully. "They are half in my pay now. So you are trusting to that weak reed, Estelle?"

An enigmatical smile marked her face. He looked curiously at her.

"What has become of your private tablet, Master Paul Terrol?" she asked, while her eyes blazed with triumph. "You have not forgotten the weak moment in which you taught me the secret of that tablet. Suppose the mysteries which it incloses should become known to the public? It is possible for Judge Lynch to hold his court here as well as in the Far West."

He was feeling hurriedly in his pockets as she spoke. A look of consternation came upon his face.

"By all the fiends!" he shouted. "If you have—"

"I have done more than you imagine," she interrupted, the disdainful smile still upon her face. "I have found your tablet, but I was not quite fool enough to keep it. It is in the possession of my last night's friend."

A fiercer oath than before broke from his lips. He caught her arm in his steel-like gripe, and glared into her face.

"You call me murderer!" he hissed. "Do you know what you risk?"

She laughed in his passionate countenance.

"Come, come," she said, quietly. "A man who has to cow wild beasts should know better how to quiet the tiger in himself. This is not the old Paul Terrol, who could be a devil in cold blood. You dare not harm me, man, while that book is out of your hands. So I will excuse you from any more of this dramatic entertainment."

Her scornful words had a powerful effect upon him. He released her arm, and sat down, as if ashamed not of his assault, but of his lack of coolness.

She drew back the sleeve from her beautifully molded arm, and revealed the marks of his brutal fingers, in livid circles around the white flesh.

"Tender and kind," she muttered. "I owe you another debt, Paul Terrol."

"Beware!" he hissed, through his close-drawn lips. "You are playing with edge tools. As for your new friend, what care I whether he has the tablet or not? It is no more than so much blank paper to him."

"Don't solace yourself with that weak fancy. I have learned too many lessons in your school to do things by halves. He knows the whole secret of it."

He sprang up again in another blaze of fury, though this time it was not unmingled with fear. Estelle retained her seat unmoved. She even held out her bared arm to him.

"Come, brute," she said, "if you wish to test the strength of your fingers again. I have outwitted you, Paul Terrol," she laughed, scornfully. "Perhaps you may get satisfaction out of my flesh."

He held back, with a momentary sense of shame. At this same instant there came a low knock at the door. As if glad of an excuse to escape from an interview in which he had been so thoroughly foiled, he hastened from the room, locking its strong door behind him.

There stood his villainous servitor who had acted as coachman on the previous night, but who looked capable of any deed of crime. He said something in a low tone to his master.

"Ah! Where have you put him?"

"Nowhere. He is in the hall."

"Fool! Why did you not take him to the blue room?"

"I would have had to carry him there. He knows too much about this house to trust himself in its private rooms. More than he ought to, for how did he ever get out of that locked room last night?"

Dark Paul made no answer. But he muttered to himself as he hurried on:

"That she-devil must have had the tablet. She could not have escaped from that room

without its aid. Fool that I was to ever teach her its secret!"

Ernest Delaine—for he was the visitor whom the coachman had announced—awaited him in the broad, marble-paved hallway of the mansion.

He stood in an easy attitude, resting one hand upon the jamb of a door, and waited quietly for the approach of his host.

The expression of Paul Terrol's dark face had totally changed. It had now a smiling, welcoming look.

"Do you wish to see me, sir?" he blandly asked. "Excuse me, but why did that donkey of a servant leave you standing here? Come this way, sir."

"He is too polite by half," Ernest said to himself, as he quietly followed.

In broad daylight, and armed as he was, he had no objection to accompany the master of the house into any room he chose. He simply did not care to be trapped into a room by himself.

They entered a small apartment near the rear extremity of the hall. It was neatly furnished in blue. Ernest quietly helped himself to a chair near the door.

"Now, sir," remarked his host, turning toward him. "Will you please say what I can do for you?"

He now, for the first time, caught a clear view of Ernest's face. He slightly started, his keen eyes closely reading the lineaments of that countenance, as if it recalled to him some disturbing memory of the past. Ernest observed him with no less interest.

"It is he!" he said to himself.

A moment of this silent scrutiny, and then Paul turned his eyes aside, while a look of strange significance came upon his face.

"I have called," began Ernest, "in reference to a young lady in whom I have some interest, and who, I believe, is at present an inmate of your house."

"Ah! Miss West? Yes, she is my guest at present." He spoke with the greatest suavity.

"I am aware of it," Ernest coolly continued. "I made several efforts last night to prevent her being your guest. Such as pulling you from your carriage into the street, and tossing you over my shoulder. These well-intended efforts failed, and she is, as you say, your guest."

Paul Terrol heard this insulting remark without a change of countenance. But, there was a look in his eye that boded no good to his visitor.

"Trifling little acrobatic feats," he replied. "I shall be happy to do you the same service if an opportunity offers. But I am sorry to have to inform you that the young lady in question is not to be seen; and that you are somewhat mistaken in your idea about her."

"Ah! In what way mistaken?"

"She has deceived you, sir, as she has deceived many before you. The woman is not right here." He touched his head significantly. "But unless you happened to touch her on her weak point you would never discover it. You interfered with me last night, in the discharge of a painful duty. I forgive you, however. You did not understand the circumstances, and must have been deceived."

"Not at all," answered Ernest, with a queer smile. "I discovered her weak point."

"Ah! Did you? She revealed her madness then?" with a doubtful look.

"Yes. It consisted in supposing that Paul Terrol is a villain. Which of course, is pure moonstruck madness."

Dark Paul laughed, as if he found this biting satire a very agreeable bit of fun.

"That is one of her notions," he said.

"But as I have good reasons for believing that this house is not a private lunatic asylum," began Ernest, "and as the young lady applied to me for protection—"

He paused. Some strange noises outside had attracted his attention. There came a cry, like that he had heard in the night, but muffled and distant.

"You wish to remove her from my care?"

"Exactly."

"But, who are you? And what claim have you upon the custody of this fair lunatic?"

"Simply this, that though Paul Terrol can lie with a remarkably cool grace, it does not follow that I must believe him. I prefer to believe that the lady is as sane as I am. And as this house is no more a prison than an asylum, I propose to take her out of your care."

"Ah! you do?" murmured Paul.

"But not without remuneration for your kindness. I happen to have in my possession a certain set of tablets, in the shape of a marble

bound book, which I fancy is not without value in your eyes. Very well, if you set any store by it, I am ready to exchange tablet for lady."

"It is a bargain!" cried Paul, in a hearty tone. "I am not anxious for the duty of taking charge of a madwoman. You don't know what you are taking on your hands. Let it be as you say—woman for tablet."

Ernest was hardly prepared for such a quick agreement with his proposition. Despite the coolness and seeming indifference of his host, he felt that there was something hidden behind all this. The tablet must have all the importance which Estelle had declared.

"Come," continued Paul. "She shall be set free immediately. You must be responsible for letting her loose upon the world."

"But I have not the tablet with me," Ernest cautiously replied. "It is too valuable an article to run any risk of losing it."

"Not with you?"

"No. I left it in the hands of a friend, with directions how to act in case I did not return within a certain time. I was afraid that you might take the queer notion that I, too, was mad, and offer me the same accommodations which you have given to your lady guest."

Paul looked at him intently while he was speaking.

"He is lying now," was the mental comment of the keen-eyed host. "He has it with him."

"Very well," he coldly replied. "Bring your friend, and as many friends as you please. There was no need for such a precaution, as I always keep to my bargains. I will bid you now a very good-day. I do not think we have any further business together."

Ernest rose to go, thinking it might be very advisable for him to have some witnesses to the exchange.

"I will be back in an hour," he remarked, as he opened the door and stepped out into the hall.

Instantly the door was drawn sharply to and locked behind him, while a demoniac laugh resounded in his ears. It was followed by a more terrible sound, the snarling scream of a tiger, now frightfully near.

Ernest recoiled in horror against the door through which he had just passed, for his eyes had caught sight of a horrible vision.

The hall had ceased to be a hall. A strong partition had arisen, which cut off its forward portion, and converted it into a square room.

And on the opposite side of that room stood an open cage, with only some slender iron bars between him and a huge striped Bengal tiger, which was pacing restlessly back and forth in its close confinement, and from which had come that terrible cry at the moment of his entrance into this perilous room.

"Perhaps you will send for the tablet when I wish, and how I wish," came in mocking tones from beyond the door.

Ernest made no reply. His eyes were fixed in horrible fascination upon that frightful beast, which was licking its cruel jaws as it glared upon him through the openings of its barred cage.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. HUDSON'S STORY.

BUT we must return to Dr. McDowell and Mrs. Hudson, whom we left somewhat hastily.

The doctor stood looking down upon her with some anger in his strong features, as she lay still insensible upon the sofa.

"She faints too confoundedly easy," he grumbled. "A body'd think I'd naught to do but to bring th' woman to her senses. There was, mebbe, some excuse for her last night; but bless me if I know what's the matter to-day."

While thus complaining to himself, he was using the necessary means to bring her back to consciousness. Cross-grained as he seemed, the worthy doctor was kind at heart, and though he had all the coolness of a professional surgeon, he could not bear to see nor to inflict suffering.

After a few minutes her eyes opened, and she cast a vague glance around the room. She had not yet regained full consciousness. At length her wandering gaze fell upon the doctor, who was seated, with folded arms, and with his sourest expression of face.

A thrilling look of remembrance leaped into her eyes. She sprung up from her recumbent posture, and gazed wildly around her.

"Where is he? Oh, where is he?" she cried.

"He? Who?" asked the surprised doctor.

"He! My son! My Ernest! I saw him, face to face! And—and I fear my poor senses fled."

Her hand pressed her brow as if some dull pain remained there yet.

"Your son!" cried the doctor, springing up,

while his hand tightly clutched the chair.

"Your son! Are you wandering, madam?"

"It was he! I could not mistake him though it is so many, many years since I saw his dear face. Oh, where is he?"

"That young man we met in the street?"

"Yes, yes!" Her hands were extended, and the light of hope was in her eyes.

"Him? Dolt that I was, I gave him the cold shoulder. Th' saints know where the lad is by this time. Never mind, Mrs. Anderson, mebbe I can find him."

Seizing his hat the worthy doctor ran hastily from the room, his veins tingling with sudden excitement, while he inwardly called himself "dolt," and "fool" at every step of his journey.

Mrs. Hudson sat in silent expectation, her eyes kindled, her arms extended, a flush of hope upon her pale face.

She needed patience. It was more than half an hour before he returned. Then he entered breathless and perspiring, rubbing his brow with a huge silk handkerchief, while his eyes sought the ceiling, the floor, everywhere but Mrs. Hudson's face.

The poor mother's countenance lost its look of hope.

"You have not found him?" she faltered.

"Never ye mind that, Mrs. Hudson," he said assuringly. "He gave me the slip, I admit. But, he's somewhere in the city; an' the city's na so broad an' wide but we'll find him yet.—To think o' what a muddle-head dolt I was, to let th' lad go!"

"Of course you couldn't know, doctor," she replied. "You must not blame yourself. But he must be found. I am sure that he is my long lost son."

The doctor seated himself, and removed his hat, as he continued to wipe his broad forehead.

"I canna say as I understand this matter entirely, Mrs. Hudson," he began, after a minute's rest. "Will ye na go over it again? Who is this Paul Terrol; and why should he steal your child?"

Mrs. Hudson's face saddened again at this question.

"It is all far back in the past," she sadly answered. "Years ago. Paul Terrol was then but little more than a youth, and my dear lost son a mere child; but the sweetest and prettiest of babes. I shall never forget his sweet baby face." She wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Yes, yes!" somewhat impatiently. "But what motive had this mon to steal him?"

"There was a large property involved," she continued. "A great property. It was left by my husband's brother; but there were several heirs. My Ernest was one of the heirs, but there were others. This Paul Terrol was one of them. And—" she paused a moment in emotion—"And he greedily craved the whole. I knew him not then. I never dreamed that he was the soulless wretch he has proved. If any of the heirs died before a certain time their share went to the survivors. That was the fatal clause in the will. With all his deep cunning he sought to deceive me into signing a paper ignoring my son's claim."

"Such a paper would ha' been o' no use to him," broke in the doctor.

"Yes it would. There was something in the wording of the will. I cannot stop to explain it now. I refused to sign. And—Heaven defend me, Doctor McDowell—he stole my child in the night! My dear Ernest! My loved, my all! Ah! it was almost a death-blow! I would have signed the paper a thousand, a million times rather than that!"

"Ye're sure it was he?"

"I know it was he!" she cried. "I have plentiful evidence."

"And ye've never seen him since?"

"Not until last night. Not until that strange and terrible meeting in your office. And is it not significant that immediately after his reappearance I should meet that face in the street—the face of my Ernest?"

"It was a child ye lost. This is a man," remarked the doctor doubtfully.

"It is his father's face, line for line," she exclaimed. "Had you known George Hudson you could not mistake."

"But, why should he commit this crime? There were several heirs, ye admit."

"They have all died or disappeared, one by one. How, you ask?" There came a significant look into her face. "Some in their beds, some by violence. I cannot connect Paul Terrol with their deaths—but I doubt him! I doubt him! There was a woman among the heirs. A mere child then, like my Ernest. She too disappeared. She too has never been seen since."

She paused, overcome with the strong emotion

which showed itself so vividly in her face. The doctor looked at her for some minutes in deep silence, his own face full of feeling.

"There's no lane so long but it has its turning," he remarked. "Mebbe the fates are now in your favor."

She replied not for a moment, her eyes wandering around the room.

"That picture!" she suddenly cried. "Will you not tell me how you came by it, doctor? It is so strange that you should have his picture."

He rubbed the bald spot on his head, while a look of reflection came into his eyes. He seemed reaching far back through the fields of memory in search of some record of his past life.

"It is only one of my whims," he remarked.

"It was years ago. I was something of a wanderer then. I chanced into a small town on the Mississippi. It was one of the rough border towns, where Judge Lynch rules supreme, and the pistol and the rope are the ready instruments of the law. Ye canna imagine the sort o' life folks led in those towns. Only the day before a mon had been shot dead. Insulted by a bravo, and given no fair chance for his life. They'd ha' lynched him, but he made his escape. They were selling his effects for th' benefit o' the town the day I came there. That picture was among them. I bought it for the eyes an' mouth, Mrs. Hudson. I have kept it as a psychological curiosity."

"It is Paul Terrol's portrait! He was the murderer?"

"Precisely."

"And the name of the man whom he murdered?" her excitement had returned.

"Allen Burke."

"He was one of the heirs! It was part of his scheme! He has removed, one by one, all who stood between him and his aim!"

Almost at the moment that the above conversation had reached this interesting point, Ernest Delaine was plunged unexpectedly into the tiger's den, and stood backed with a sudden sense of fear against the door, with the eyes of the fierce animal glaring upon him through the bars of the cage.

But he was too stout of heart to be for more than a minute overcome with terror. He laughed at his impulse of fear.

"A neat piece of clap-trap," he said to himself. "And to think that I, with all my old experience, should shrink from a caged beast. But it was so confoundingly unexpected. Who is the man that is coming in here to let loose the tiger? Does he think to scare me by such a weak device?"

These last words were spoken aloud. They were answered through the door.

"If you had read the tablet you might have found that Paul Terrol has other means of opening the tiger's cage. Return it to me, or by the God above us I will set the creature loose upon you."

Ernest replied with a disdainful laugh.

"Not upon compulsion, my brave sir! The tablet is in good hands. Do me an injury and it will be made as public as the mid-day sun. Even if I am not back within an hour it will be handed over to the police, with the key to its contents."

"You lie. You have it with you."

The eyes of the young man flashed.

"That is the craven I knew you to be," he replied. "You can give the lie to a helpless man. Coward and villain, you would not dare to do it were I free."

The same mocking laugh as before replied to this defiance.

"Fools trust to muscles. Wise men trust to brains," came from beyond the door. "Will you give up the tablet?"

"Never."

"Very well, then. Your fate be upon your own head."

The sound of retreating footsteps followed. Silence reigned without.

Ernest turned his eyes again toward the beast. The ferocious animal, which had paused in its walk, and seemed listening attentively to the voice of its master, now resumed its restless movement, licking its chops, and occasionally emitting a low growl, as it fixed its eyes upon the intruder into its den.

Headless of the beast Ernest stepped boldly out into the room. His first movement was to examine the false wall which had so quickly converted the hall into a closed apartment.

It was firm, and unyieldingly fixed in its place. Yet there were indications as if it had been raised bodily from the cellar, through an opening in the floor, and fastened firmly to ceiling

and walls. He was but beginning to learn the mysteries of that strange house.

There was little doubt but that the tiger cage had in like manner risen or descended through a trap. It was a skillfully prepared scheme of the villainous master of the house to destroy or frighten his foes. Ernest no longer doubted that similar means of opening the cage from without existed.

He drew the revolver from his pocket and examined its charge. Should he shoot the beast in its cage before any further steps could be taken by its villainous master? He raised the pistol and took a steady aim at the sleek shoulder.

"No, no!" he muttered, lowering the weapon. "It would be an unfair advantage. The poor brute is a prisoner like myself. Nor do I hardly imagine that his master will dare let him loose upon me."

He was startled at this instant by a thrilling cry from above.

Looking up he saw that a narrow square in the ceiling had been removed, leaving an open space. In this opening appeared the face of Estelle West, white with terror, while from her lips had come that startling cry.

"Oh! this is too terrible!" she exclaimed. "Give him the tablet! Give it him a thousand times! No matter what comes to me! Give it him, and escape that dreadful fate!"

Ernest felt his heart thrill at the undisguised interest in her voice.

"Do not fear for me, Miss West," he replied, calmly. "I do not fear a caged tiger. It is all idle bravado on his part. But I am not the man to be frightened by bluster."

"You do not know him!" she returned. "You know not what he is capable of! Return him the tablet!"

"Never," he replied. "I will see him grace the rope he so richly merits, first."

"If you do not," came a harsher voice, "by the gods above us I will let the creature loose upon you!"

The face of Estelle had disappeared from the opening, and was replaced by the villainous countenance of Paul Terrol.

Ernest answered not, but he raised his pistol with a sudden gesture, and pointed it at the face above him.

It was instantly withdrawn.

"You dare your fate then. I leave you to the tender mercies of Lulu!"

The trap closed. Almost at the same instant the front of the cage fell. The tiger was free!

For an instant it drew back against the further side of the cage, as if surprised. Then with an alert spring it leaped into the center of the room, where it crouched with slowly moving tail, its glaring eyes fixed upon its prey.

Ernest stood unmoved, the pistol still in his grasp.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE DEED.

ALL below was still as death to the two who stood above. But the floors and walls were thick and close. No sound could readily come through their dense barrier. For all that the silence told the ferocious brute might even now be rending its helpless prey.

Estelle stood backed against the wall, her arms extended, her face full of horror and despair. Suddenly she sprung forward and grasped Paul Terrol with the strength of madness.

"Coward! demon!" she hissed, in a half-choked utterance. "You dare not expose him to the beast! Fly! Fly to his release! Or—"

"Or what, my fair vixen?"

"Or I shall tear down the door myself and set him free!"

He laughed, with that cool, demoniac laugh. He had at first yielded to her fierce assault, but had now recovered his firmness, and stood as immovable as an oak tree that is blown upon by a breath of air.

"It seems to me that you have taken a sudden fancy for this young blood, my dear Estelle. It is a new departure in you to show such a warm interest in the young men."

There was a biting insult in his words. A hot flush shot over her cheek and brow. With a quick movement she dashed her white hand in his face.

"Insulting dastard!" she cried. "You dare not say such words except to a woman and a prisoner! I will release him! I will raise the town!"

Loosing her hold of his arm she ran quickly along the upper hall in which they stood, and toward the stairs, which were visible at a short distance.

His face tingling with her blow, which had

been delivered with vim, his eyes flashing with rage, he pursued her. Swiftly as she ran she was no match for the agile form of the man. With leaps like those of the tiger—with which he had consorted till he resembled the wild creature in more particulars than one—he darted after the flying woman.

She had not reached the head of the stairs ere she felt his iron grasp on her shoulder. With a shriek of fear and nervous excitement she strove to escape; but in vain. Despite her efforts he drew her irresistibly backward.

"Come, girl! You may as well save your breath and your limbs. As for screaming within these walls it would be as well to cry out in the heart of a mountain. And you surely did not fancy you could outstrip Paul Terrol in the race?"

She broke from his grasp, and crouched upon the floor, her face in her hands, while deep sobs followed the impulse of rage which had moved her.

"Oh! mercy! mercy!" she implored. "You cannot be so cruel!"

"He had his choice," was the heartless answer. "He refused to return the tablet. He must take the alternative."

"He has it not," she cried, with a sudden hope. "He has left it in other hands. You will bring retribution on yourself. You dare not, for your own sake, injure him."

A harsh, mocking laugh broke from his lips. "He lies. He has it. And even if he had returned it to me—"

"And even then?" she piteously asked.

"I should have given him to the tiger all the same."

Her hands were at her ears, as if to shut out the expected snarl or scream of the brute over its prey. She crouched helplessly on the floor. All her strength, hope and energy were gone.

"Would you know why?"

No answer came from her white lips.

"No matter. I will tell you, whether you wish it or not. It is not that you have taken a fancy to this boy. Sudden fancies are suddenly quenched. You can find other lovers in his place."

Not a word in reply. Her body rocked in agony. She no longer sobbed. Her feelings were too intense for that.

"It is not that he has the tablet. I could readily obtain that. It is for yet another reason. Do you divine it?"

She shook her head in silent agony.

"It is because he is in my way," he answered, with a monotony of tone that was becoming terrible. "Fool that he was to venture within my reach. I knew him at sight. I am determined that no one else shall have the chance of recognizing him."

She turned up to him her pain-lined face, in silent questioning.

"I am not a fool, Estelle. I do not kill for pastime. No, nor even for revenge. I destroy only for safety. Last night I was accosted by a mother, who claimed that I had stolen her son. She was right. I did steal her son. This is he—Ernest Delaine, or Ernest Hudson—one of the heirs to the Melville estate."

A cry broke from her pallid lips.

"Ah! And you have not made victims enough to that dread Moloch? This youth, too, must die?"

"He escaped me in his youth. He shall not escape me now."

"But, he knows it not! Oh! let him go! He will never know it!"

"He will never have the chance," he coldly answered. "I do not trust to contingencies. His mother is in this town now. She might meet him at any moment. And you, too, my fair tigress, with the hidden claws—do you fancy I would trust you with this secret in your mind?"

"You may trust me! I will never breathe your secret! I swear it! Only release him from that dread fate!"

"It is too late," he replied, while a cruel smile curled his thin lip. "Lulu is not one to wait. My noble pet does my will promptly."

The tortured woman sprung to her feet, and seized him by the throat with the clutch of an insane person. For a moment he was forced to give way before her, his face purpling, as he gasped for breath. She pressed him against the opposite wall.

"Wretch! monster! Die thyself, then!" Her beautiful face had the expression of a maniac.

A moment only. Then her paroxysm of rage yielded and he tore himself loose from her grasp. A fierce oath broke from his lips as he seized her relaxed arms, and forced her back across the passage.

"Fool!" he hissed through his set teeth. "Whom do you think you are dealing with? One would have thought that you knew Paul Terrol better."

She made no reply. She was too breathless to speak.

"You have gone too far," he continued, still holding her arms, and glaring with his serpent-like eyes into her face. "You have overstepped the limits of safety to me and you. Last night you threatened me with exposure. Was that the extent of wisdom? You should have denounced first and threatened afterward."

A sense of fear for herself was coming over her face. There was something of the demon in that glaring countenance. It was not rage. It was a deeper and more intense passion than that, if possible. It was the look of a man without pity or remorse, whose aims were threatened, and who had his enemy in his grasp.

"You knew me not, Estelle West," he continued. "I have sworn to possess that property. One by one the heirs have fallen. But two remained. One of them, the young fool who trusted himself so recklessly in my hands, lies before me the prey of Lulu, my pretty avengress. It is the tigress that has done it all. I am not to blame. A stupid servant left him in the beast's den. No suspicion can attach to the wealthy Paul Terrol."

He laughed again. To her ears there was the snarl of the tiger in that laugh.

"Only one person knew of my crimes. She kindly forbore to expose me. Last night she was weak enough to threaten me with exposure. What resulted? She thought to escape me. I was meddled with in my effort to force her to return, but she was heedless enough to come here herself. And her new friend too. Both my flies, of their own accord, walked into the web of the spider."

"You know why I did not denounce you!" she exclaimed, in a tone of deep reproach. "You know it was that my name is not Estelle West, but Estelle Terrol! A sister could not divulge her brother's crimes, much as they wrung her heart!"

He looked at her with a momentary amazement. Then he broke into a laugh colder and more heartless than before.

"Oh yes! I had forgotten for the moment," he sneered. "It is wonderful what a sister's love will do. Why, you foolish girl, did you never divine that that was but another of my little schemes?"

"What?" She was breathless with a sense of mingled fear and hope.

"That sisterhood. My plan has had its full effect, and I do not mind revealing you the truth to-day. You are no sister of mine."

"Not your sister?" A flash of hope and joy came into her eyes.

"Not at all. A distant cousin, perhaps. It was only to my interest to make you believe you were my sister."

"Thank God for that!" she fervently replied. "That dread thought has been the most horrible of my life."

His soulless face remained unchanged in its cold intensity of purpose.

"I stole you in your childhood, as I stole Ernest Hudson," he continued. "Why did I do so, you ask? Why did I bring you up as my sister? I will tell you. I have already told you that there are two living heirs to the Melville estate, besides myself. You know the fate of the heirs of that fatal property. One of these fated heirs is now below our feet, the prey of the tigress. The other is—"

"Who?"

Her hands were clasped. She had backed against the wall, and stood gazing with a look of ineffable dread into his cruel face.

"Who?" he cried, in a terrible voice. "It is yourself! Not Estelle West, not Estelle Terrol; but Helen Melville! It is yourself, the last of all that stand in my way!"

She held her hands before her eyes to shut out that dread countenance. She crouched again to the floor. Terror had for the moment overmastered her. She was like the hunted hare in the fangs of the coursing hound.

"It is you, Helen Melville!" he repeated, in that same terrible tone. "I have cleared all but you from my path. Thus, thus I remove the last barrier between me and the Melville estate!"

There was a peculiar crackling sound. He had pressed his hand against the wall. She felt the floor give way beneath her.

She leaped up, with outstretched arms, while a loud cry broke from her lips. It was too late. The portion of the floor on which she

stood was rapidly sinking. She had already descended to her waist.

"You might have lived had you been wise," he coldly said. "But you knew too much. You and I could not live together in safety."

She had disappeared below the floor. In a moment more the trap came back to its place, but she was not upon it.

It had left her in the den of the uncaged tigress!

While these exciting affairs were proceeding, Dr. McDowell, in another part of the city, was engaged in a search for the person whose appearance had produced so strange an effect upon his lady friend, Mrs. Hudson.

"There must be som'at in it," he said to himself, "for the pair body was strangely held. I'd like monstrously to find th' boy. It'd be a fine thing to gi' him back to his old mither. Folks say that Fergus McDowell's a hard-hearted man; but they dinna know him. He's as soft at the heart as a ripe apple."

But, just what best to do our worthy doctor was at a loss. It was not so much the size of the city, as the difficulty of knowing in what quarter to look for an unknown person. In fact, there was but one suggestion of any importance that came to his mind. This was to seek through the hotels. The young man might be a stranger to the town, and had possibly taken lodging at a hotel.

If this effort failed the only remaining measure was to inform the authorities of his quest, with as full a description as possible of the appearance of the person sought. In this way, through police effort, he might be found.

While thus engaged he little dreamed that danger was approaching his own domicile. Not danger to himself, it is true, but possible difficulty to the characters of our story. Paul Terrol was making his way there, with a cat-like hope of stealing unseen into the doctor's office, and capturing the paper which he had seen the night before, hidden in the frame of his own portrait.

"The skies are getting clear," he said to himself, as he walked on with a peculiar softness of tread. "They are all gone. One after another they have fallen before my hand. And yet not a suspicion rests upon me. It is the tigress and my stupid servant who are responsible for the death of these two last."

He rubbed his hands together, as if he would wipe off even the suspicion of crime.

"But one thing remains," he continued. "That fatal paper hid in the picture. Vividly I remember the day I put it there. I had no time to destroy it. I had to hide it on the instant and fly from the vigilance committee, who were thirsting for my life. Fortunate it was that I discovered that perilous paper again last night. If now good luck favors me! For this once only, and the whole game is in my hands!"

He was before Dr. McDowell's house. He rung the bell with a sonorous peal. In a moment a servant was at the door.

"Dr. McDowell?"

"He is not in. But he will be soon. It is near his office hour."

"I will wait. I have an appointment."

The unsuspicious servant led him to a room adjoining the doctor's office, and left him there. Yet hardly had he disappeared when Paul was on his feet. With cat-like tread he traversed the passage. The door of the office stood ajar. The much coveted prize seemed within his grasp!

CHAPTER IX.

THE MOOD OF THE TIGRESS.

WE left Ernest standing upright in the improvised room in the hall, pistol in hand, while the fierce beast was crouched upon the floor not ten paces from him, its yellow eyes glaring upon him, its tawny body moving with a snake-like motion to and fro, its long tail sweeping the floor and lashing its lank sides. It seemed awed for the moment by his firm and fixed glance. But this could not be for long. It might spring upon him at any instant.

And yet he did not fire. With his steady nerve, at that short distance, he might have destroyed his savage foe at a single shot. Yet the weapon lay unused in his hand.

He had a reason for this. The voice of Paul Terrol still rung in his ears, "I leave you to the tender mercies of Lulu."

Lulu! A quick thought shot through the young man's brain. He had known the beast when a child. He had fed her a hundred times with his own hand. Was that look in the

brute's eyes the glare of ferocity? Was it not rather the look of awakening recognition?

Scarce a second had elapsed since Lulu sprung from her open cage, and crouched her terribly lithe form upon the floor almost at his feet; yet in that second a host of thoughts had passed through his active mind.

"Lulu!" he cried. "Lulu! my pet! You have not forgotten me, Lulu?"

At the first tones of his voice the ears of the tigress were bent backward; her form stirred with a strange uneasiness; she moved her head from side to side as if to catch more fully something familiar in that voice. Her eyes fixed themselves with a strange intelligence on his face. A low purring sound came from the ferocious mouth.

"Lulu!" he continued, moving a step toward her. "Have you forgotten me, Lulu?"

The animal sprang quickly forward. It was a moment of intense excitement to Ernest. He raised his pistol again. Was it going to be a contest for life and death?

No. The animal had recognized its old friend! She was couched like a cat at his feet, licking his shoes with her long, red tongue. Her cat-like purring continued. He was safe! The half-tamed creature had suddenly changed from a foe into a friend.

He stooped and patted the sleek, tawny head. He caressed the huge animal as one would caress a favorite cat. There was no evidence of ferocity in the beast. She seemed, on the contrary, overjoyed to meet an old friend, and her body moved in throbbing response to the caressing movement of his hand.

"Poor Lulu!" he softly said. "I fancy you are too well fed to wish to make a meal off an old friend."

Yet it must not be imagined that Ernest was quite at his ease. A royal Bengal tiger is no safe playmate. It had its moods, but the mood of ferocity was usually in the uppermost, and might display itself at any moment. The strange freak of recognition and of affection was not to be trusted.

Something must be done. At any moment Paul Terrol might discover the unexpected behavior of the brute, and take some means to arouse its latent rage. Doubtless its long familiarity with men, and the abundant food given it, had tamed the creature more than its villainous master imagined. But—

That "but" kept returning to Ernest, as he looked nervously around him. Was there any means by which the brute could be enticed back to its cage?

He could imagine but one, and that must be a bold one. Any movement on his part might arouse the latent fury of the animal, yet some decided movement must be made.

Ernest arose, repeating the name of Lulu, in the same soft tone as before. He walked toward the cage, the creature following as obediently as a dog. With her smooth, graceful, gliding movement and the noiseless fall of her feet upon the floor, one would scarce have conjectured what terrible strength, what carnivorous ferocity dwelt within that soft-moving, beautiful form.

With an agile spring Ernest leaped into the open cage. The tigress followed him. He seated himself upon the cage floor, while she laid her great head in his lap, in seeming enjoyment of the rubbing caressing movement of his hand.

"Confound it all!" he said half aloud. "This is all very neat and delightful; but I'd give my best coat to be out of it! I hardly believe Lulu will turn upon me. She seems too glad to see me. And yet it is too much like playing with edge tools."

He made a movement to arise. A low ominous growl came from the animal's throat. It was like the rumbling of distant thunder.

"By Jove, but this is interesting!" growled Ernest. "Does she intend to keep me here as a plaything till she gets hungry, and then make her supper on me? I most decidedly object to any such operation."

He drew the pistol from his pocket and pressed it against the smooth breast of the tigress. A single shot might pierce her heart. Should he pull the trigger?

"No, by Heaven, no!" he ejaculated. "If it was a woman whose head lay upon my lap, and who trusted me through love, I could shoot her as quickly. Poor Lulu, whatever comes of this, I will not requite your trust so treacherously as that."

His eyes were busily inspecting the condition of the cage as he spoke. The whole grated side of the inclosure had fallen. But he now saw that it was hinged at the bottom, and that the fall had

been occasioned by the withdrawal of a bolt that held it fast, this bolt being worked by a rope from the floor above. The rope had afterward been cut, and the bolt lay on the floor of the cage. It might be possible to refasten it.

Caressing the animal still with one hand he reached the other out the open side of the cage and grasped one of the iron bars of the grating. Could he lift it? He was in the very worst position to do so, for the grating was heavy, and he grasped the bar close to the cage. It was like lifting a heavy weight with a lever by pressing upon it near the point of support instead of at the extremity.

Yet he was very strong, and his arm rendered vigorous by long and persistent exercise. In his time he had supported his own weight and that of another, with one hand on the flying trapeze. The strength gained in such athletic exercise did not fail him now. Slowly the heavy grating yielded to his strength of wrist, and rose from the floor. Inch by inch it arose until it stood out horizontally from the side of the cage.

Its weight now became terrible. His strength was nearly gone. Would he be able to finish his task? Or must he let it fall, and lose all the benefit of the plan of escape which he had devised?

There was but one hope. He twisted his body more toward the open side. By this means his grasp reached further out, and he was able to get a more advantageous hold upon the iron. The ferocious brute growled again, and Ernest doubled his caresses to pacify her.

Again the grating moved upward. It was now above the horizontal position, and the wide space was slowly closing.

Any one who has ever attempted to lift a weight at such a disadvantage must know that now his control over it increased with every inch of movement. While his arm and the grating were alike horizontal it needed an immense effort of strength. It was then a dead lift from a most difficult position. But as it rose into a more slanting position a double advantage resulted. The dead lift became changed into a pull inward; and he was able to move his hand further and further along the approaching iron, thus constantly gaining a more advantageous grasp.

It had now reached an elevation of forty-five degrees, and his hold upon it was firm and secure. But the beast now showed signs of uneasiness. Its purr changed into a continuous low growl. Its body moved uneasily. It lashed the floor impatiently with its tail.

Ernest saw that to succeed in his scheme he must be quick and resolute. With a hasty, powerful jerk he brought the heavy grating to its place, closing the open side of the cage.

The uneasy brute sprang up from its recumbent position, its growl deepening into a hollow roar. It moved to the side of the cage and laid its heavy paw upon the grating.

Ernest took quick advantage of the opportunity to secure the bolt which lay at his feet, and insert it into the hole which fastened the grating in its position. A rapid knotting of the rope around a projecting pin and the bolt was secure; the tiger's cage was closed.

And yet this was certainly an extraordinary movement. He had locked himself in the cage with the animal. How did this improve his chances of escape? He had previously possessed the freedom of the whole room. Now he and the animal occupied together a contracted space! And the good-humor of the tigress seemed gradually changing into rage.

Indeed the human tenant of the cage had good reason for apprehension. The suspicious beast put both its paws upon the grating and shook it furiously, while a snarling cry came from its mouth.

Ernest moved cautiously toward the end of the cage nearest him. The reader must not imagine that he had acted without a definite and well considered object. He was sufficiently well aware of the make up of the cages of performing animals to know that there was a small door at one end of the inclosure, bolted or otherwise fastened, and intended for the entrance and exit of performers.

Before entering the cage he had satisfied himself of the presence of such a door, and that the outer and inner bolts were combined, so as to move together.

His present object was to escape by means of this door of exit.

Cautiously, then, he moved toward it, while the animal vented its growing anger upon the closed grating.

But before Ernest could reach this much desired portal the beast suddenly left the grating,

moved hastily before him to the end of the cage, and squatted like a dog upon the floor, directly in front of the door.

It had, as if designedly, closed his intended avenue of escape. The beast sat looking at him, licking its chops with its long tongue, and showing its fangs as it opened its mouth in a wide yawning movement.

Something must be done to pacify the creature ere he could hope to escape.

"Lulu! My pet Lulu!" he began again. "Pretty Lulu!"

He gave his voice all the softness possible, as he cautiously approached, and reached out his hand to stroke the suspicious animal. It threateningly lifted one of its paws, and he thought it the part of wisdom to suddenly withdraw his hand.

Yet it was more uneasiness and suspicion than anger that affected the animal. After a minute or two of this alertness it stretched its tawny length upon the floor of the cage, and permitted the approach of his caressing hand. Yet escape was as far off as ever. Lulu was backed close up against the door of escape.

Yet this attitude was retained but a moment. She suddenly lifted her great head in an attitude of attention. Then she sprang up and ran rapidly from end to end of the cage.

Attracted and alarmed by these unlooked for movements Ernest at first did not discover their cause. Then the tones of a harsh voice arrested his attention. He looked hastily around. Yonder was a broad platform descending swiftly into that dread room; and on it—yes—it was—*it was Estelle West!* It was she whom he had not yet known for a day, and was already growing to love.

The same instant the platform slanted downward, causing her to slip from it to the floor of the room! It immediately shot upward again and resumed its place in the upper floor.

A cry broke from his lips that was drowned in the enraged howl of the tigress. Estelle looked fearfully forward, her quick eyes taking in the scene at a glance. Ernest still living! but locked in the cage of that terrible beast, whose appalling cry rung through the room!

She stood spellbound for an instant, and then darted hastily forward.

"Oh, Ernest! Oh, my love! Ah, if you must die so fearfully let me die too in your arms!"

She had shown her whole heart in that one moment of supreme dread.

"Back!" he cried, while his heart leaped with sudden joy. "Back! Come not within reach of the animal! The brute will rend you into fragments."

CHAPTER X.

A COSTLY FLAME.

It was the supreme moment of which brave men avail themselves, but which cowards let pass. The loud cry, the sudden movement of Estelle toward the cage, had infuriated the beast. Lulu, with a scream of rage, sprang against the grated front of the cage, and would have caught her with her extended paw, had she not hastily recoiled at Ernest's quick command.

It was his opportunity, while the attention of the beast was otherwise directed. With a hasty movement he slipped the bolt of the door, flung it open, and sprang through it with an alert leap, at the same moment that the beast turned its attention to him. With her snarling scream Lulu sprang for the open door, but Ernest was too quick. He had closed and bolted it on the instant. The heavy brute struck with all her weight upon the end of the cage, with a dead sound like the fall of a weighty body. The wagon-like cage shook and groaned in its every joint. But it held firm. It was too strongly made to be broken asunder by the utmost strength of its inmate.

With a cry of joy Ernest leaped forward. He had been over-excited by the events of the past few minutes, and this cry was partly in relief to his feelings. The vision of Estelle in danger had worked him up more than his own peril. And the sweet confession which had escaped her in the moment of her overwhelming dread! He was not likely to forget this.

"Saved! Saved!" she cried, with a hysterical laugh, as he ran toward her with involuntarily extended arms.

She essayed to move, but it was with a staggering step. She hesitated, trembled, and fell into his protecting arms, her face rosy with a deep blush as she hid it upon his shoulder.

"Estelle! my love!" he cried, warmly embracing her. "I have known you not for a day, and yet it seems years. I love you! I

love you, sweet! Ah! and I know you love me in return!"

She raised her face, all red with blushes, and looked into his eyes.

"I knew it not," she softly replied, "until Paul Terrol taunted me with it. Then my whole soul leaped up in defense. Then I knew that my heart was yours. Our mutual peril, this dread danger, has, I fear—has made me—unmaidenly."

"No, no!" he cried, pressing the form that quivered in his arms with mingled love, dread, and nervous excitement. "No, no!" not unmaidenly. True to yourself and to your soul. My peril forced the sweet truth from your lips."

"But," she exclaimed, disengaging herself from his embrace, and looking fearfully around, "we must not loiter here. That dreadful beast, from whose fangs you have strangely escaped, may break out upon us. Or the more cruel beast who has doomed us to such a death, may discover our escape, and again let loose the tiger upon us. Let us fly! At once!"

"But how?" he asked, doubtfully. "We are locked in here. Is there any way out by the mode in which you entered this den? How did you discover that trap in the floor? What made you risk a descent into this terrible room?"

She looked at him in amazement.

"I? Why, do you not know, Ernest? It was he, Dark Paul Terrol, who consigned me to the tiger's rage, as he had already consigned you."

"He?" exclaimed Ernest, his face flaming with sudden fury. "He? Heaven help me, if I do not be deeply revenged for this! But, you are safe, Estelle! We are safe!"

He caught her again in his arms, with a sudden impulse of joy, and pressed her fervently to his heart.

"But, why?" he continued. "Why has that human tiger tried such a terrible deed. I know that he would have destroyed me because I had his tablet. But, you! Was it because you knew of his crimes?"

"No. But I cannot tell you the story, now. But, there were deeper reasons for his wishing to destroy us both. It is a long story, and we have no time to lose in escaping. The tablet. Have you really left it with another? Or do you still have it?"

He laughed.

"I did not think it safe to acknowledge it to him," he replied. "And after his exposing me to the beast I was too angry to acknowledge. Yes, I have it, Estelle. I have it here."

He produced from an inner pocket the marble-bound book. Her face lighted with joy on seeing it.

"Ah! we are safe! This house is full of secret traps, and they are all recorded in that book. Have you matches, Ernest? Can you make a light?"

She hastily opened the clasp of the book, and breathed upon its ivory pages. Meanwhile he sought in vain through his pockets. An exclamation of despair broke from his lips.

"By all that's good! I used them all last night. Not a solitary match is left."

She gazed upon him with wide, affrighted eyes. The book dropped from her nerveless hands to the floor.

"Then it is useless to us! Useless! We will yet be the prey of the tiger!" Her hands were clasped in despair. She looked into his face with a piteous appeal.

He stood a moment in half dismay, his eyes full of doubt.

"I have my pistol," he at length said. "If I had but something that would serve as tinder, I might flash a charge of powder into it; but—" he looked around in doubtful quest of something that might answer his purpose.

"Here! here!" she cried, drawing from her pocket a delicate lace handkerchief, and impulsively rending it into fragments. "It is real Brussels lace," she continued, with a nervous laugh. "But no matter if it was stuff of diamond dust."

Ernest was not troubled with any high veneration for real lace, and he arranged the flimsy affair on the floor with utter unconcern as to its cost. Then, removing the charge from one chamber of his pistol, he broke the cartridge, and poured the powder into the empty chamber.

A click of the lock, a flash of flame from the tube of the revolver, in an instant the torn handkerchief was in a blaze.

"It will not last an instant," she cried, as she tore a rich scarf from her neck, and fed the flames with it. "We must keep up the heat until I can bring the secrets of this book to the light."

"Quick, then!" he ejaculated. "You hold it

to the flames. I will feed the fire if I have to burn my coat, hat, and boots in the effort; or even set fire to this hellish house. Quick, Estelle!"

The sight of the flames had excited the tigress to madness. She was bounding furiously from end to end of her cage, screaming with rage and fright, and shaking the grating with her powerful paws as if she would rend through its strong barrier.

It was a terrible accompaniment to their efforts.

It formed, indeed, a strange picture. In the middle of the floor the blazing heap of lace, over which Ernest was kneeling, with stern, set face, adding, fragment by fragment, to the flame, a handkerchief which he was deliberately rending into strips. Opposite him, kneeling with her beautiful, flushed, excited face, and the ivory whiteness of her throat exposed by the loss of its veiling scarf, was Estelle, the jewels of her rich attire flashing in the flames, while she eagerly held leaf after leaf of that mysterious book to the revealing heat. And in the background the tiger's cage, the tawny, striped, ferocious queen of the jungle, darting fiercely from side to side, and making the air resound with her terrible cries. It seemed a strange scene of incantation. One might have thought that demons were being called up by some magical spell.

Slowly the dark characters emerged upon the smooth pages. She breathed on page after page, and held each eagerly to the flames.

"Had you not better read what you have brought out?" he asked. "Will it not disappear?"

"No. Not before I can examine it."

He was searching in his pocket for more combustible material.

"I think I shall have to begin with my coat," he remarked. "Or no. Here is something which will last for a little while."

Unnoticed by her he had opened a Russia leather pocketbook, and extracted a handful of bank-notes from it, one of which he held into the flames.

"Why, what are you doing?" she cried, as she saw the figures start out on the greenish paper.

"The fire must be kept up," he coolly replied, "no matter what the fuel. I will begin with the low figures. That is only a ten."

"No, no!" she cried, pushing his hand away. "We cannot afford to warm ourselves at that expense."

"What matters?" he recklessly answered. "It may be life or death, girl! These bits of printed paper would be of no use to me dead. If they can help to save my life and yours, let them go. I shall think them very well spent."

"Well, well; you may save your fuel for the present. It is probable that we have all the information we need here."

The tiger had now ceased its cries, but it was still restlessly pacing its cage, bending its yellow eyes fiercely upon the two occupants of the room. Ernest could not help thinking that there was some jealousy in its rage. He knew enough of animals to know that such a feeling is not uncommon with them.

Meanwhile Estelle was eagerly bending over the pages of the book, while the unfed fire smoldered upon the floor. Slowly she converted the cipher writing into good English.

"Ah!" she suddenly cried. "Here is something of interest."

"Have you discovered a means of escape?" he asked.

"No. It is something else. Something that we will have to look into after we escape from this place."

She was now examining other pages of the book. Ernest waited nervously. The minutes were flying by. Their foe might at any moment discover their escape. He grasped the pistol firmly in his right hand, while he kept his eyes fixed upon the door of the room.

"I have it now!" she exclaimed, joyfully rising. "The trap by which I was let down into this room may be made to descend and carry us up again. There is a spring here that controls it. But," she doubtfully continued, "may be not still be above there?"

"I hope he may," exclaimed Ernest. "I should like the chance to fling him headlong into the den he has prepared for us. Touch the spring, Estelle."

She silently obeyed, pressing firmly upon a certain point in the decorated wainscoting of the side of the hall.

Her movement was followed by a slight sound. A square portion of the upper floor began to slowly descend. In a minute or two it

had reached and rested upon the floor of the hall.

"Quick! there is no time to lose," he exclaimed, stepping upon it.

She followed his example. No sooner had she removed her hand from the spring than the trap began to reascend.

"Farewell, Lulu," he said, waving his hand gleefully. "I thank Heaven that you had such a good memory and poor appetite. Farewell, old friend."

A cry that did not seem the scream of rage broke from the tigress as she saw them slowly ascend. Was it her call of grief and affection?

Very soon their heads were above the level of the upper floor. It was deserted. In a minute more the trap resumed its place. It had again become, to all appearance, a fixed portion of the floor.

"Have you the book?" he asked.

She looked with a guilty feeling at her empty hands.

"I must have let it fall," she muttered.

"No matter. We may have no further use for it."

They were in a long passage, similar to the hall below. Near where they stood a broad flight of stairs descended. Grasping his pistol in his right hand, and holding her hand in his left, Ernest moved with a light step toward the stair, looking warily about him as he did so.

Her face was full of excitement and dread. She clasped his supporting hand with both hers, and fixed her eyes upon his resolute face, as she followed him, step by step, down the stairs.

But no obstacle intervened. The hall below was reached. The partition which converted the rear portion of it into a room was visible. Through its barrier they could hear the cries of the excited animal.

Drawing her forward Ernest hastily moved to the front door of the house. It was fastened within, but he easily opened it. The next moment they were standing in the open air without. They were safe at last.

CHAPTER XI.

DR. McDOWELL'S PATIENT.

PAUL TERROL, as related in a previous chapter, had not cared to wait for Dr. McDowell's return in the room to which he had been conducted.

He had left this room immediately upon the disappearance of the servant, and sought the doctor's office, which was but a few steps distant on the same floor.

His step was stealthy as that of a midnight thief as he made his way toward the office in which, the night before, he had had such a strange experience. All was silent about him. His path seemed clear.

"It is my turn now," he muttered. "My friend, the doctor, had his opportunity last night, and failed. Give me but two clear minutes and I will not fail. That paper once in my possession I can snap my fingers at fortune."

The office door stood ajar. He gazed cautiously into the room. It was empty. A laugh of triumph broke from his lips as he stepped boldly forward.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "The opportunity is mine. Nothing stands between me and that dangerous sheet. But I would have it now, though ten devils stood in my way."

The prowling villain suddenly paused, while a look of doubt, anger and dismay crept over his features. The picture was gone! Only the blank wall remained in the place which his portrait had occupied!

For a full minute he stood gazing in dismay, while a look of anger, that quickly deepened into fury, crept over his dark features.

A fierce oath broke from his lips. His face was purple with rage. He glared around him with the instinct of the madman for something on which to vent his fury. But this mood lasted only an instant. Paul Terrol had been taught by bitter experience that he who would successfully act the villain must never let passion get the better of him. With a strong effort he drove the fierce impulse back from his brain. He seated himself, and clutched the chair firmly with his hands. Much of his fury went out in this muscular effort. In a few minutes he was again the cool villain, though a dark, ominous cloud hung upon his brow.

"Fool that I am to let my temper get the better of me at that rate," he muttered. "The picture must be here. He has moved it. It is somewhere in the house."

Evidently it was not in the office. A minute's examination convinced him of that. He stealthily made his way to the contiguous rooms, but with the same ill result. None of them contained the much desired picture.

He was on the point of making his way downstairs with the same purpose, thinking that possibly the doctor had transferred it to his parlor, or to some room worthy of such a valuable work of art, when the front door of the house was heard to open, and a step advanced to the stairs.

The prowling villain at once retreated to the office of the doctor, where he seated himself with a cool air of expectation.

It was Dr. McDowell who had entered. He grumbled to himself as he slowly ascended the stairs:

"It's na going to be an easy matter to find this

young Hudson. Here I've thrown awa a good morning for naught. And I suppose the mither 'll keep me at it, if he's a month in th' finding. It's charity, mebbe; but it's not professional; not professional."

He gained his office, wiping his brow with a red bandana, and puffing slightly from his exertions. He started on perceiving that the office was occupied.

"Why didna the stupid dolt tak' him to th' reception-room?" he said to himself, as he advanced toward this seeming patient.

But a monstrously strong Scotch exclamation broke from his lips as the patient turned his face and revealed the well-remembered features of Paul Terrol.

Dr. McDowell was as near to being flustered as he ever permitted himself to be. The apparition of Satan himself would not have more surprised him.

A cool smile rested on Dark Paul's face.

"Good-afternoon, doctor," he said, with the utmost ease of manner. "This is your hour for receiving patients, I believe."

The doctor stared at him.

"What if it is?" he growled.

He deliberately proceeded to remove his hat, coat and boots; and to replace them with an office coat and slippers.

"Simply that I called for a little professional service," Paul coolly rejoined. "Excuse me if I follow your example."

"He, too, proceeded to remove his coat."

"You don't object to me as a patient?" he asked.

"No," answered the doctor bluntly though with a latent curiosity in his eye. "It is my business to deal with flesh and blood, not with men as individuals. I'd doctor th' devil, if he called on me professionally."

Paul quietly opened and pushed up the sleeve of his shirt.

"I met with a slight accident last night," he remarked. "A trifling flesh wound only. Will you please treat it?"

He extended the bared arm, on which a red, slightly swollen spot showed where the doctor's lance had entered.

Every trace of surprise or anger had left Dr. McDowell's face. It wore its ordinary sour professional look. He quietly took the muscular arm between his thin fingers, and bent his experienced eyes upon the wound.

"Eh! Eh!" he muttered. "An incision wi' a sharp weapon, I take it. Ye've mayhap lost some blood, fer it's directly over an important vein. But it's a mere scratch. There'll be no more bleeding—except it becomes necessary." There was an odd look in his eyes. "Put on your coat, my mon. There's no treatment needed."

The patient laughed slightly as he resumed the coat. Much as he prided himself on his coolness here was a decided lesson in the art.

"What's the fee, doctor?" he asked, as he turned toward the door.

"Five dollars," replied the grim-faced doctor, "for a surgical advice or operation."

Paul quietly laid down the money.

"Ah! excuse me," he said, seemingly with sudden recollection. "You had a picture here, somewhat resembling me."

A light broke into the doctor's face. The true meaning of this unexpected visit was about to show itself.

"Yes. A portrait of a murderer; who escaped Judge Lynch, and left his pictured villainy behind. I purchased it as a psychological curiosity."

"That's just the interest I have in it," laughed Paul, as he resumed his chair. "It is odd what strange resemblances there are between faces. But when one finds a marked likeness between a murderer and an honest citizen, it becomes a remarkable coincidence. Strange to say that picture closely resembles what I must have looked like ten years ago. I should like to purchase it from you, doctor. I feel an extraordinary interest in it."

"I have no doubt," the doctor dryly answered. "Yet I hardly think it's for sale."

"Why, my dear sir, do you set such store by it?"

"Well, na such store, mebbe. And yet it's a fine work of art. It cost me a pretty sum. And, as ye say, there's some'at remarkable in it."

"I don't think the price need stand between us, doctor. I'd be willing to pay well for it, for two reasons."

"Na doubt. Perhaps more than two."

"Two only, on my honor. But they are good ones, as you will admit. One is that I hardly fancy that a face which so closely resembles mine should be shown as the portrait of a murderer. The other is that I can readily pass it as a portrait of my youthful self. As I have no such portrait why, of course, I set some value on this. Name your price, doctor. I hardly think we will squabble about the figures."

"Why, if it cooms down to dollars and cents," answered the doctor, with a queer glint in his eye, "I should never part with that picture for its mercantile value. It has an artistic interest to me. I value that bit of canvas and paint at five thousand dollars."

He looked at Paul as if fancying that this would prove a settler. But not a muscle changed in the face of the would-be purchaser. A faint smile curled his lip as he answered:

"Five thousand. Is that your ultimatum?"

"Yes. If it should coom to sell the picture."

"Very well. I will give you five thousand. I want the picture, and I never let money stand between me and my fancies."

The doctor looked steadily at him.

"There's more in that picture than canvas and paint," he said to himself. "I'd gi' something to know what's behind all this."

"I am sorry," he remarked aloud. "But I am

doubtful that the bargain canna be consummated. I ha' parted with the picture."

"Parted with it," ejaculated Paul, losing his coolness in surprise at this announcement.

"Precisely."

"You did not get your price for it?"

"That was my selling price. My giving price was much lower. The picture has been presented to a friend—yet I din'na say but it might be bought yet."

Paul's face, which had fallen, brightened again at this announcement.

"Name the owner and the price," he said, in a quiet tone.

"Na, na. It's for th' owner to say. Yet mebbe I can help on the bargain. It'll be another coin than greenbacks that buys it now."

Just what to make of all this was rather too much for Paul's powers of guessing. Yet he repressed his impatience as he repeated:

"Name the owner and the price."

Dr. McDowell had risen from his chair, and stood looking down upon his unwelcome visitor. There was a touch of satire in the tone of his reply.

"Th' owner is Mrs. Hudson, a lady whom ye had th' honor to meet here last night. Th' price is the return of her son, who was stolen from her by one Paul Terrol!"

Paul, too, rose, and began deliberately to put on his gloves. He bit his lips, and seemed striving to repress some rising feeling in his mind.

"I am willing to do all in my power," he at length said. "Though I can scarcely say that I care enough for the picture to put myself to much trouble. As for the boy, I have a strong fancy that he is no longer in the land of the living. Will you be kind enough to advise me of Mrs. Hudson's place of residence? I can probably convince her of this."

"She can be seen through me," the doctor dryly answered.

"Very well," answered Paul, biting his lip again, as he coolly left the office, followed by a triumphant look from the doctor.

"I will drive myself home," he said to his coachman on reaching the street. "Do you keep an eye on the movements of Dr. McDowell, the inmate of this house. Track him wherever he may go, and report to me."

He drove rapidly home. There had been an unexpected check to his plans. In the language of the chess-board the Scotch doctor had checkmated him.

He ground his teeth with a momentary escape of the anger which he had repressed in the doctor's office.

"Smart as you are, Dr. McDowell, I will beat you yet at your own game. First to find out where Mrs. Hudson is. I fancy I can bargain better with a soft-hearted woman than with a hard-headed Scotchman."

But there was something else in his mind just now. Lulu had doubtless finished her work. The two remaining heirs to the Melville estate were no longer in his path. It remained only to remove the traces of the tiger's work, the remnants of that human meal which he had provided for the ferocious beast.

The men who formed his household were entirely trustworthy. They were a party of wretches who were ready to do anything for money, and whom he kept about him by a free use of his cash, with a lurking intention in his mind to get rid of them all by aid of the tiger when once he had no further need of their services.

This thought now ran through his mind as he entered the house and sought Lulu's den.

"The wise workman uses his tools first, and then gets rid of them. An unused tool is dangerous to leave around. I shall dispose of mine soon."

All was silent as he entered the blue room and approached the door which he had locked upon his intended victim.

"The beast must be sleeping," he said, picking up a slender, elastic whip, which hung in this room.

The next moment Dark Paul had turned the key in the lock and thrown open the door. He expected to behold a horrible vision of torn flesh and rent bones, of human forms rent out of all semblance to humanity, and the gorged beast sleeping upon the ruin it had made.

Yet no sense of compunction entered his hardened heart as he flung open the unlocked door, and looked into the expected slaughter chamber.

What was his surprise to behold nothing of the expected scene? The room empty, the tigress in her cage, nothing but a small heap of white ashes on the floor.

With a curse of rage and fear he sprang forward, glaring to right and left, as if hoping to see the expected vision in some corner of the chamber. Before his eyes upon the floor lay his marble bound tablets. He hastened to possess himself of this book, which had proved of such service to his foes.

The man was almost beside himself with rage. He fairly howled in his fury, running like a madman from side to side of the room. His fury aroused the sleeping beast, which now rose against the bars of its cage, and showed signs of pleasure in his presence. He had tamed it so that it was like an obedient dog to him, rather than a furious wild beast.

"Ha!" he ejaculated, his rage diverted toward the animal. "It is you that have let them escape? By the gods, but you shall pay for it!"

In a minute he was within the cage. The tiger advanced fondlingly toward him. But what was its surprise to find itself met with sharp blows of the whip, keen, cutting lashes of the steel-like instrument which made it draw back howling with pain? Mercilessly the blows fell. The angered brute leaped toward his infuriated master, but the sharp blows fell more keenly than ever upon her face and eyes, and she retired in screaming and crouching fear before his merciless hand.

CHAPTER XII.
CLEARING THE WAY.

At the moment in which Dark Paul Terrol was venting his rage on the angry but cowed beast, his two intended victims were seated in the parlor of the Westmoreland hotel, the establishment which Ernest had made his temporary home.

The few minutes of supreme danger in the tiger's den had opened their souls to each other more than months of calm intercourse could have done. The revelation there made was one that could not be withdrawn, and there was a warm light in the looks which they bent upon each other, and an earnest pressure in their clasped hands.

"You have lived in that house?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes. I had no other home. Not but that I had known of Paul Terrol's evil deeds. But, consider my situation. I believed myself his sister. I dare not denounce my brother. Nor would it have done any good. He had covered his path too well to leave any evidence against him. I simply lived on, enjoying his bounty, but under continual protest against myself."

"But, what was the cause of the affair last night? Why, then, did you so fear to enter his house? Why was he taking you there by force?"

She was silent for a moment, with her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"He had been brutal to me," she replied, in a low tone. "I escaped from the house and threatened to expose his villainy. In fact, I had been for days a sort of half-prisoner. He attired me like a queen, but he treated me like a captive." Her voice had grown strong and indignant. "Last night he grossly insulted me, and I broke from the house, threatening, sister or not, to reveal his crimes."

She paused again, as if in doubt how to continue her story.

"And he pursued you?"

"I had no place to go to," she continued. "I scarcely knew a soul in this city. I wandered the streets for several hours, in doubt where I should seek a refuge. I did apply to a hotel, but they refused to receive me. I dared not ask elsewhere, there was something so insulting in the looks of that clerk."

Tears stood in her beautiful eyes. A flush of indignation came upon Ernest's cheek.

"The fellow shall answer for it to me," he indignantly said, with a reassuring pressure of the hand.

"No, no! He knew me not. It must have seemed suspicious for a well-dressed lady to be wandering the streets at midnight. I would not have you undertake the task of punishing all the brutes in this city."

A warm smile broke through her tears, like sunshine through a summer rain.

"I am your protector, now, Estelle," he said, softly.

A moment of loving silence fell between them. Then she took up the thread of her story.

"He pursued me," she continued. "He discovered me still wandering the streets. He dragged me by main force to his carriage, stifling my cries. That was just before my fortunate meeting with you. I had just broken loose from his choking hands, and screamed for help, when you came, like an angel of mercy, to my aid. Ah! I do not know what would have become of me but for your fortunate aid. He would have slain me, as he sought to do to-day."

She shuddered with strong emotion. He drew his chair nearer, and folded his arm protectingly around her waist.

"That is past, Estelle," he softly answered. "You need fear him no more. He has had his day. It is my turn now. He shall answer dearly to me for this day's work. I owe him no love from of old."

"Indeed! He hinted at as much!" she cried with excited haste. "He told me that he had stolen you as a child from your mother's house; that your name was not Ernest Delaine but Ernest Hudson; that your mother was now in this city. Oh! and more than that, you were one of the heirs to that dreadful estate! It was for that he sought to murder you. Not on account of that book."

Ernest's face revealed a dozen emotions as she quickly repeated these strange and important fragments of information.

"But you?" he asked. "Why should he seek your destruction? Because you knew too much?"

"Not that only. He told me the truth which he has so long concealed. I am not his sister—thank Heaven for that! My true name is not Estelle West, but Helen Melville. I, too, am one of the heirs of that dread estate. We were both in the way of his avarice. He sought to remove us both."

His arm closed more firmly about her yielding form. Here was a new bond of sympathy between them. His heart beat high with hope and joy as he gazed into the beautiful face, whose bright eyes were bent upon him with looks of warm affection.

"It is a large estate. Estelle?"

"Yes. Very large."

"We are rich, then. But no matter for that. I am rich without it." His expression, as he looked into her eyes, told what he meant. "I remember Paul Terrol from my childhood," he continued. "He was a harsh master. What torture he gave me in teaching me the tricks of the circus! I was twelve years old when I escaped from his tyranny."

She started from his arm, and turned to look with eager eyes into his face. Her features were suffused with sudden joy.

"Can it be?" she cried. "Why, my story is the same. I have been with him from childhood as a circus performer. For years I was the daring rider, his 'Star of the West.' Ah! do you not remember? We were children together! We learned these tricks in company. You were my little lover,

and I your little sweetheart! You have not forgotten, Ernest?"

"Forgotten?" he cried, clasping her in his arms, and pressing her to his heart. "Forgotten the childish vows we made, the young love we felt? No, never! It is no wonder it came to us again at sight of each other. You are my own now, Estelle. Our youthful vows have blossomed into love. You are my own, despite all the villains in the universe."

He pressed his lips warmly to hers, in the first sweet kiss of love.

A step sounded outside. With blushing haste the two lovers released each other and resumed their seats, striving with a very weak effort to appear composed.

But we must pass rapidly over the next hour, during which they continued lost in the happy intoxication of love's young dream.

At the end of that time we find them on the street again, on their way to the police office, in which Ernest wished to lodge information of Paul Terrol's murderous attempt, and to obtain a warrant for his arrest.

Estelle accompanied him, as a most important witness to the charge. The party to whom this deposition needed to be made was absent, and they were given chairs in an inner room, while waiting for his return.

There was another person here on seemingly a similar errand. But they were too much wrapped up in each other to have any eyes for strangers, while the stranger himself paid no more attention to them than if they were but two more of the buzzing flies which annoyed him.

A few words of unimportant conversation passed between them, when Ernest, with sudden recollection, asked:

"What was that last important secret you discovered in the tablets, Estelle? It is a pity that you did not keep them. But, at any rate, if that is of any value to us we may as well make use of it."

It took her a minute or two to recall it to memory. So many exciting events had passed that this was almost forgotten. It returned to her, however, after a little thought.

"Ah, yes! I remember now. It was important, though I do not see how we are to make use of it. We cannot establish our claim to the Melville estate unless our identity is proved. There is a paper in existence which proves who we are. So much I learned from the tablets."

"Ah!" exclaimed Ernest, with intense interest. "And this paper?"

"He stole it, as he stole us. He had some object in preserving this document, until he had disposed of Allen Burke, one of the heirs. He was then about to destroy it, when he had to fly for his life from a vigilance committee."

The stranger who was present, and whose quick ear caught these low-spoken words, looked up with a keen glance. Something had strongly interested him.

"I did not find all that in the tablet," she continued. "It contained but hints, but I know enough of his life to make a connected story out of these hints. It was a fatal moment of forgetfulness for him when he left that dangerous book behind him. Though he probably did not dream that any one would discover its secret."

"But the paper? What were its real contents?"

"That I can but guess at. At all events, he had not time to thoroughly destroy it. He hastily concealed it in an opening in the frame of a portrait of himself which hung in the room. He then fled for his life."

The stranger's interest was redoubled. He sat with his chin on his two palms, gazing intently toward the speakers, whose backs were turned to him.

"And the picture? Did he recover it? Has he it now?"

"No. All his effects were lost, the picture, with its precious packet, among them."

"Then this information will be of no use," he doubtfully replied. "There is no probability that we will ever come across that vanished portrait. But no matter; I fancy that Paul Terrol's career is nearly run."

"Paul Terrol!"

It was the stranger who had spoken, springing to his feet as he did so.

"Excuse me," he continued, in a broad Scotch dialect, as they turned in surprise. "I've a notion that ye'll na have to look far for that picture. But, bless me, I never dreamed o' what ye say about it."

Ernest looked at him in astonishment.

"Doctor McDowell!" he muttered.

"Eh! what's that? Does the lad know me?—Bless my eyes, if it isn't the very person I was seeking. Was it not ye that helped me into my office wi' a fainting woman?"

"Yes," answered Ernest. "But that picture? Do you know where it is, then?"

The worthy doctor fairly capered around the room. He had not been in such a state of excitement in his life before.

"So, Paul Terrol, the secret's out now!" he ejaculated. "It's na wonder ye were willing to pay five thousand dollars for th' picture. Why, my friends, I've got that picture! Bought it as a psychological curiosity." The doctor laughed at his own joke. "He wanted to buy it of me to-day. Do ye guess the price I asked him for it?"

"No," answered Ernest, while Estelle's eyes were fixed with deep interest on the face of the excited little doctor.

"The price of it was th' return to his mither of a lad which this villain stole years ago." The speaker looked significantly at Ernest. "Th' bairn should be a full grown mon to-day. His name was Ernest Hudson. Paul Terrol declared that he couldna return him. Would ye know why?"

"Yes," Ernest briskly answered, though his eyes were full of expectant light.

"Because the lad was dead. I've a notion the mon was slightly mistaken."

"No. He thought that Ernest Hudson was dead."

"He did?"

"Yes. He had left him as the prey of a tiger. Fortunately the brute was less bloodthirsty than its master."

"I know! I know!" cried the doctor gleefully. "You are Ernest Hudson. I ha' been hunting ye these four hours past. It was that brought me here. Do ye ken who was the leddy that ye helped me carry into the house?"

"Ah!" cried Ernest, his face deeply flushed. "There was something in that lady's face! Was it—ah! was it—"

"It was your mither, lad."

"My mother?" a cry of exultation broke from his lips. "My mother, whom I have dreamed of for years? Heaven bless you, Dr. McDowell! you bring me the warmest joy of my life."

He turned to Estelle, who put her hand in his, while a look of intense sympathy burned in the violet depths of her eyes.

It was a happy moment for all three there assembled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PAPER IN THE PICTURE.

MEANWHILE Paul Terrol was not idle. The unexpected and astounding escape of his intended victims weighed on him at first like a nightmare. That they could have shut up the tigress again in her cage without any harm to themselves was the mysterious circumstance. Their escape from the room was not so strange. They possessed the tablet in which were set down at length all the secret doors and traps of the house, and Estelle understood the mode of reading it.

But the caging of the animal! For the moment he fancied that some of his own men, to whom the beast was familiar, must have aided the prisoners. Yet he dare not accuse them. It would not do to reveal to them the full secret of his murderous attempt.

But something must be done, and at once. These fugitives must be retaken or he must fly for safety. His schemes had reached that point in which his money might fail to aid him. He must take them ere they could act against him, or he must escape himself.

And the document concealed in the picture! It was necessary to regain that. Dr. McDowell would certainly suspect something wrong, and would search the frame. Long as his secret had remained undiscovered, it was endangered now since he had shown his hand so plainly. If that hidden paper was discovered all his long efforts would be defeated, and the estate of which he was now in possession be in great part torn from him, to go to his escaped foes.

With Paul Terrol to decide was to execute. As he strode into the hall, still fuming with the rage which had so lately overmastered him, he discovered his coachman, who had followed him almost immediately to the house.

"You have been quick," cried the irate master of the mansion. "You have not returned without carrying out your instructions?"

"I ain't that kind," answered the man, with a grin of intelligence. "The doctor left his house right away after you. I tracked him pretty close, you can be sure of that. He went straight to a house on Plain street. It was a neat-built, fancy-front house, No. 69. He weren't there five minutes when he come out again. There was a woman come to the door with him. A well-built, handsome person, of maybe forty or fifty years old."

"With white hair?" asked Dark Paul, quickly.

"Yes, kind o' whitish. And a sort o' sorrowful look about her. Rather tall, but very well set."

"Good!" answered the Tiger King, with a gesture of satisfaction. "Did you follow him further?"

"In course I did. He went straight from there to the police office. There I found Mike a-standing. So I left him on the watch and came home to report."

"Very well," was the quick answer. "I am glad you did, for I have other work for you of importance. You remember the young fellow you brought here last night, in company with Estelle?"

"I reckon I'd not forget him soon, being's I've seen him twice, and been shot at twice by the chap."

"He has escaped me again. He and Estelle both. They must be retaken. And quickly; there is no time to lose."

A look of resolution came upon the evil face of the coachman.

"If it's in the wood," he said. "I ain't no slouch at a job."

"The first thing is to find where they are," the King rejoined, with rapid utterance. "They must be found if the whole city is to be searched. Put all the men immediately at work. Try first the hotel registers. His name is Ernest Delaine. If anything is found report at once to me."

"Ay, ay! Trust me and the boys to pick him up if anybody can. And if there comes a chance to snatch him or her I suppose we're not to wait for orders."

"No," with fierce haste. "Don't let a chance pass. I'll make you rich if you succeed."

Ten minutes afterward the house was empty. The men had all set out on the duty thus assigned them, while their master, quickly saddling a horse, rode off at a rattling pace for the city. He had work of his own to do quite as important as that given his villainous agents.

In a room of the mansion No. 69 Plain street sat Mrs. Hudson. It was a large apartment, neatly but

rather sparsely furnished. On the walls hung several pictures, mostly engravings, but one of them was the portrait of Paul Terrol, about which centered so much interest. Dr. McDowell had told the truth to his visitor in regard to his disposal of this picture.

Mrs. Hudson herself had greatly changed in expression since the previous night. The marks of the old sorrow were there yet, whenever her face fell into repose. But it was overlaid with an expression of hope and joy, that beamed at intervals through her sadness, like sunbeams gleaming through broken clouds. Evidently some happy expectation lay deep in her heart.

"So many years of grief and despair have passed over me," she murmured. "If it is indeed my Ernest! Oh! it must be! I cannot mistake that face! But I do hope that Dr. McDowell may be quick and successful in his search. I shall not cease to fear my merciless foe until I see and know my Ernest, my dear, dear son!"

She was interrupted by a low knock at the door. "There is a gentleman to see you, Mrs. Hudson," announced a servant.

"Did he give his name?" she asked.

"That was not necessary," came a calm voice behind the servant. "We are too old acquaintances to need ceremony."

A low cry broke from Mrs. Hudson's lips, as the visitor pushed into the room, and quietly seated himself.

"Paul Terrol!" she breathlessly ejaculated.

"Yes.—That will do," to the surprised servant. "We are old acquaintances, you see."

Mrs. Hudson was striving to recover her calmness. What could this visit portend? A dozen conjectures ran through her brain. At any rate he could harm her no further, and she might gain some useful information. She waved her hand in dismissal to the servant, while drawing her chair away as though from the vicinity of a serpent.

He looked with the cold, calm glitter of his eyes into the flushed and excited face of the woman.

"You are somewhat surprised at this visit, Mrs. Hudson," he uttered.

"Yes," in trembling accents. "But I hope—you are not here without a purpose—you are come to tell me what you have done with my son?"

"We are on the same quest, it seems," he quietly rejoined. "You seek what is yours. I seek what is mine."

"What do you mean?"

"I too have been robbed," he continued, "and you are the recipient of the stolen goods. That portrait which hangs upon your wall is mine. It was stolen from me years ago. I demand its return."

She looked at him, while a strange light rose in her eyes. Dr. McDowell had told her of his conversation with Paul Terrol upon this subject.

"Very well," she coldly and cuttingly rejoined. "Theft for theft. Restore what you have stolen from me and the picture is yours."

"I know nothing of your son," was his harsh response.

"That is untrue, sir," she excitedly exclaimed.

"You stole him! None but you! Dr. McDowell has told you the price of that picture. Give me back my son, and it is yours."

"It is mine now," he rejoined, springing from his chair.

With a quick cry she arose and ran before him to the picture, stretching out her arms in repulsion.

"Back, sir! Touch it not! Think not I fear you! I will raise the house by my cries if you dare touch it! You shall not have it unless you return my son!"

He stood for a moment with a baffled look before the excited woman, his keen eyes fixed upon her with that look which had cowed the tigress. Should he be defied in this way? He, Paul Terrol—and by a woman? He strode forward with uplifted arm, as if to hurl her from before the picture.

But at this instant there were heard voices and steps in the passage without. He hastily withdrew to the side of the room, while Mrs. Hudson bent her eyes with hopeful expectancy upon the door.

It opened and Dr. McDowell entered. But evidently there were other persons in the passage without.

"Ah!" she cried, hastening forward and laying a nervous hand upon his arm. "Have you—have you been successful?"

"Calm yourself, my dear woman," he replied, in his cool tone. "I have—"

He had time to say no more. Her quick eyes had caught sight of a face through the open door. A sharp, glad cry, and she ran forward with open arms.

"It is he!" she exclaimed. "It is my son, my Ernest! It is the child who was stolen from me, now happily restored! My dear, dear Ernest!"

He was clasped in her arms, while she poured kisses and tears of joy alike on his cheeks and brow.

"Mother!" he softly murmured. "Ah! can it be? Have I indeed found the mother, so long lost, so long dreamed of?"

She pushed him a little from her, while her burning eyes closely examined every feature of his face.

"Yes, yes!" she again cried. "I cannot be deceived. It is indeed my son, stolen from me by Paul Terrol."

"My earliest remembrance is of that man," he replied, a look of warm joy overspreading his face, as he yielded to his mother's tender embrace.

Estelle had entered the room behind them, and stood looking at this scene, with an interest almost as warm as that of its participants.

But a sudden cry of alarm came from her, while a deep pallor overspread her features, as her eyes wandered from the mother and son.

"Paul Terrol! Here!" she exclaimed.

A bitter laugh responded. They had all been so wrapped up in the one scene that no eyes had before perceived this serpent in their Paradise. The villain had taken the opportunity of the diversion of all thoughts from himself to hastily examine the picture, and to quickly draw from its frame the secret paper, of which the merest corner displayed itself.

The laugh that broke from his lips was one of triumph and disdain. It sounded, in the pure joy of that meeting, like the discordant laugh of a demon.

Dr. McDowell took a step toward the intruder, his face showing the red flush of anger. Ernest hastily disengaged himself from his mother's arms, while his ingenuous countenance burned with indignation.

"You have your son now, Mrs. Hudson," Dark Paul quietly remarked. "The price is paid for the picture. I suppose I may take it and go?"

"Na, na!" exclaimed Dr. McDowell. "We want more than that. There's a property at stake. We want proof! Ye canna ha' the picture till ye've given us proof that this young man is Mrs. Hudson's son."

Paul laughed again disdainfully.

"I have a slight interest in that property," he said. "I have worked for it for years, and it is mine, all mine. You cannot prove in court that this boy is your son. I will acknowledge nothing, I know nothing of him. The Melville estate is mine, only mine. No one else can lay claim to a foot of it."

"You have acknowledged!" cried Estelle, starting forward. "You acknowledged to me that he was Mrs. Hudson's son! You acknowledged that my real name was Helen Melville, and that I also was an heir to the estate! You acknowledged all!"

"Then I retract all," he coldly responded. "Prove it, if you can."

"I will prove it!" she hotly replied. "You have murdered at least three persons who stood between you and this property! Only this day you sought to murder Ernest and myself! I will prove it by my oath and his!"

"Come, come, my dear, you are dreaming," he laughingly answered. "There are half a dozen inmates of my house who can swear that nothing of the kind took place. You are full of your fancies, child. Because some persons died suddenly it does not follow that I am a murderer."

She stood with flushed cheeks and brow, repelled by his scornful laugh.

"Say no more," remarked Ernest, gently laying his hand upon her arm. "Leave me and Dr. McDowell to deal with him."

"No, no!" she cried, as a sudden remembrance came to her. "There is proof! There is proof! It is concealed in that picture!" she pointed to the portrait near which Paul was standing. "There is a paper there containing proof of the identity of both Ernest and myself. Let it be searched."

A quick flush of anger came into Paul's hard face.

"It is my picture," he exclaimed, "and I have been denied its possession too long. If I cannot have it no one else shall."

While speaking he tore the picture from the wall and cast it fiercely to the floor. The next moment he was trampling it under foot, rending the glass and frame into a hundred fragments, and defacing the pictured canvas with his heavy boots.

"There is your picture!" he shouted, his eyes blazing with scorn and defiance. "Find your document there, if you can. I, Paul Terrol, laugh at and spurn you all!"

With a quick spring he gained the door of the room. In an instant he was without. He had escaped.

Ernest ran to the scattered fragments of the picture. There was no paper there.

"He has it!" cried Estelle. "He stood near the portrait! He must be pursued and the precious document recovered!"

Dr. McDowell ran to the window.

"He is escaping on horseback," he cried. "Let us follow him at once! To the police office, Ernest, for the warrant and the officers!"

In a moment more they had vanished in hot pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPRINGING OF THE TRAP.

A few steps brought the pursuers within hail of a passing cab. In a minute more they were within it, and were rapidly making their way toward the police station. Arrived here it took scarcely another minute to make known to the officers what had happened.

"He is guilty of all the crimes in the calendar!" cried Ernest. "He must be pursued and taken at once. But he is surrounded by three or four ruffians. We need aid in the enterprise."

There was reason to believe that it might be an enterprise of some danger. Four officers were detailed to accompany them. The villain might choose to defend himself in his house; or he might seek to escape.

"Dinna let us be wasting moments here," cried the doctor, impatiently.

"Every minute counts when we have a man like this to deal with," broke in Ernest.

In a very short time they were on the road again, a second cab having been pressed into the service.

It was now approaching evening. The sunlight was casting long lines across the city streets. It would be dark within an hour. The horses were driven at a furious pace. Very soon they were out of the city, and approaching Dark Paul Terrol's suburban mansion.

As they drew up near the gates a seedy-looking loafer was observed, leaning against the wall.

"Did you see a man pass this way on horseback?" asked one of the officers.

"Guess so," drawled the tramp. "A matter o'

ten minutes ago, or ther'aways. Pushed his critter like blazes; and turned inter that ther' gate."

"Good! We've holed our fox. Now, gentlemen, to see that he does not give us the slip. Come!" cried the officer.

They sprung from the carriages and hastened through the gateway into the inclosure.

The house presented a strangely quiet appearance. It was entirely closed, doors and windows, and there was nowhere about it the least aspect of life. They looked at each other dubiously.

"I hope there's no lie in this. It would be awkward if we're tricked," said one.

Another of the officers ran quickly to the stables, which lay just back of the mansion. He emerged with a look of satisfaction.

"All right," he cried. "His horse is there, blown from a hard gallop. Our fox is in his cover; you can bet on that."

The house must be entered then. But as a preliminary measure, two of the officers were placed on guard at the sides and rear of the mansion, while the remainder of the party advanced to the front.

The door failed to yield to their efforts. It was firmly fastened. The other doors and windows of the house were similarly secured. A fusillade of blows fell upon these portals, but without effect. Not a sound was heard in response. They looked at each other curiously.

"There's nothing for it but to break our way in," said the principal officer. "It is sure now that our man is in there. I am not going to be kept out by any locked door. Look around, lads, for something heavy. We must burst this door open."

But the desired implement was not so easy to find. All the doors were strong and heavy. The house was a regular fortress. It would be no easy matter to break their way through those thick oaken portals.

While the officers were seeking for something suitable to their purpose, Ernest was making a critical survey of the mansion, with another object in view.

The first story was high, the sills of the second-story windows being fully twenty feet from the ground. Nor was there any portico by whose columns they might be reached. He looked around for a ladder, but none was visible. The only connection with the second floor was the thick stem of a climbing vine, which ran up close to the wall of the house, and spread out in luxuriant leafage on the upper part of the wall.

"Here is what I want, lads," he exclaimed. "I will be inside that house in a jiffy."

"By that stem?" queried Dr. McDowell. "Ye canna do it."

Ernest laughed gleefully.

"I haven't spent half my life in a circus for nothing," he replied.

In a moment he had caught the stem and was climbing it hand over hand with the speed and agility of a cat. It swayed and creaked with his weight, but the spreading tendrils above clung firmly to the wall, and in a minute he was near one of the upper windows.

Grasping the top of the open shutter of this with one hand, he pressed the wall with his foot, swinging the shutter in against the window. The next moment his feet were upon the sill, and he had thrown up the sash.

The eager eyes that followed him below saw him disappear through the opening. This was immediately followed by the sound of a door thrown violently open, and the noise of a sharp struggle in the invaded room.

"By ma soul, but th' lad's got to fight for't!" cried the excited doctor. "I hope no hurt'll coom to him."

There succeeded a crashing sound, as if somebody had been flung violently to the floor, the noise ringing loudly through the still air.

Dubious looks passed between those outside. Ernest had been attacked; possibly hurt or even slain.

"By Heaven! I am going into that house if I have to burn my way in!" cried the principal officer, in hot excitement.

But before any steps could be taken a noise as of withdrawing bolts sounded from the inside of the door near which they stood. It was flung open, and Ernest appeared, flushed and breathless.

"He is here!" was the rapid announcement. "I had it with him, hot and heavy! He attacked me in the room above! But I tried an old trip of mine on him, and down he went like a log. Come, gentlemen, follow me and we will take him!"

They lost no time in obeying this excited demand, but swarmed after him into the house. The rear door by which they had entered led to one of the work rooms, and they passed quickly through kitchen and wash room, entering at length the dining room, and from that emerging into the main hallway of the edifice.

Here they came to a sudden halt, for before them, in the door of a room on the opposite side of the hall, stood the Tiger King, his muscular form dilated, his eyes flashing fury, a pistol extended in his hand.

"He's a dead man who makes a step more!" came in low fierce accents from his set lips.

"Then I'm the man!" exclaimed Ernest, drawing a revolver, and springing forward. "By good luck it's a game that two can play at."

At the same moment several other revolvers covered the defiant villain. He did not fire. Furious as he was the odds were too evidently against him.

"You wish to take me?" he yelled.

"Yes."

"Follow me then, and take me if you dare!"

He turned and fled.

They rapidly followed. In a moment more they found themselves in an apartment furnished in blue, a room which Ernest vividly remembered. A door led from this room, through which the fugitive had just passed. The officers hurried after him, but suddenly stopped and cowered back in dread and surprise.

For before them was the cage of Lulu the tigress. The beast was crouched in a corner of the cage, a low savage growl coming from her lips, while her eyes glared furiously upon the intruders.

With an alert spring Paul loosened the bolt at the top of the cage. The whole grated front fell open with a crash to the floor. The animal was free.

A savage discordant laugh broke from the villainous lips as he saw the affrighted backward rush of his foes.

"Why don't you take me?" he scornfully asked. "Here I am. Take me!"

The animal had not yet moved. Only the low, ominous growl told that life remained in the ferocious beast. The officers had rushed back into the blue room, the door of which was not yet closed.

"Come, take me!" Dark Paul laughed again. "Lulu is very gentle. She won't object."

Yet there was something unwonted in the demeanor of the tigress. It was not in this growling mood she was accustomed to receive her master. With a sense of anger at her surly crouching he struck her a blow with the whip.

It was a fatal blow. Quickly as the lightning flash leaps from the cloud the mighty beast sprang from her cage and upon him. Those at the door of the room closed it in feverish haste, shutting out the view of the dread scene portended in the frightful scream of the infuriated tigress.

We must go a step back to explain this sudden change in Lulu's mood. Not more than an hour had elapsed since Paul Terrol had subjected her to a severe punishment. Since then she had been sulking in pain and rage. The sight of him had brought back a portion of her accustomed fear and respect, but had not removed her lurking fury. The animal was in that mood in which a feather turns the scale. This came in the blow which she had just received. All the ferocity of the queen of the jungle was aroused by that blow; all fear and affection vanished; in an instant she sprang upon her foe.

Those without failed to see the terrible scene that followed. It was a battle for life and death between man and tigress. The alert villain saw at a glance what he had provoked, and caught at her throat with both hands as she sprang upon him. Man and beast rolled together to the floor.

As we have said Paul Terrol's grasp was like steel. The beast gasped for breath in the choking vigor of his hands. He kept her head at a distance, so that her yawning jaws, with their terrible rows of teeth, failed to come near him.

But her armed claws were free, and were tearing the flesh from his bones at every stroke. The contest was too unequal to continue long.

"Stand aside!" cried Ernest to those near the door. "The brute has attacked him. I cannot stand here, and let a man be torn to pieces before our eyes!"

He flung open the door and bounded into the room, pistol in hand. At that same instant the tigress had torn Paul's hands from her throat with a stroke of her powerful paw. Through the open door the affrighted eyes of those without saw that fierce mouth close upon his throat with a sickening, crunching sound.

At the same moment the report of Ernest's pistol reverberated through the rooms. The tigress sprang convulsively upward, and then fell in a dead and crushing heap upon the torn body of his master. The bullet had gone through her heart.

It was a terrible scene. The floor streamed with blood. The gleaming eyes of the Tiger King turned for one instant upon his avenger, and then closed forever in death. The teeth of the tigress had severed his jugular vein!

But we will draw a veil upon this closing scene of our story. Paul Terrol's last card had been played and had failed to win the game. His intended victims were free. He had himself fallen a victim to the beast to whom he had trusted to free him from his foes.

We must step a month forward in time, and enter a room in which were assembled all the remaining characters of our story, Mrs. Hudson and her son Ernest, Estelle West now known as Helen Melville, and Dr. Fergus McDowell.

"It was fortunate, indeed, that the paper was recovered from the dead body of Paul Terrol," remarked Mrs. Hudson, her face seemingly twenty years younger, as she gazed lovingly upon her recovered son. "We would have had trouble otherwise in proving your identity and that of my dear Helen. Now there is no obstruction to your obtaining possession of the Melville estate, of which you are the sole living heirs."

"Is it a veritable large estate, Mrs. Hudson?" asked the doctor.

"Yes. It is worth perhaps half a million."

"Then I dinna wonder at his fight for't. But I canna see yet why the mon ever drew up and kept that paper."

"Because there were other heirs," she replied. "Doubtless his first object was to get Helen and Ernest completely under his influence, so as to control their share of the property. To do this he must have proof of their identity. That is why this paper was prepared. But when he changed his plan and one by one murdered all his competitors then it was to his interest to destroy the paper. Fortunately he did not succeed in doing so."

"I see, I see," answered the doctor. "A well-laid scheme, a veritable well-laid scheme. It's guid luck that it failed."

The reader must not be surprised that Ernest and Helen took no part in this conversation. They were too much wrapped up in each other to have eyes or ears for anything else, and a conversation in a low murmur was proceeding between them while the two older members of the party were engaged in the above colloquy.

Three months afterward Helen had again changed her name. She had now become Helen Hudson, the happy wife of Ernest Hudson, who, on his side, would not have exchanged his bride for an angel from the skies.

They had not chosen to reside on the Melville estate, which was now legally theirs, but were living in a beautiful mansion in the city, in company with the long sorrowful but now happy mother of Ernest, while Dr. McDowell was a frequent and always welcome visitor to their delightful home.

And so we must leave them, their life's aim accomplished, their happiness secured, and the hand of Time, which throws wormwood and gall in the life paths of so many, scattering only roses in theirs.

THE END.

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